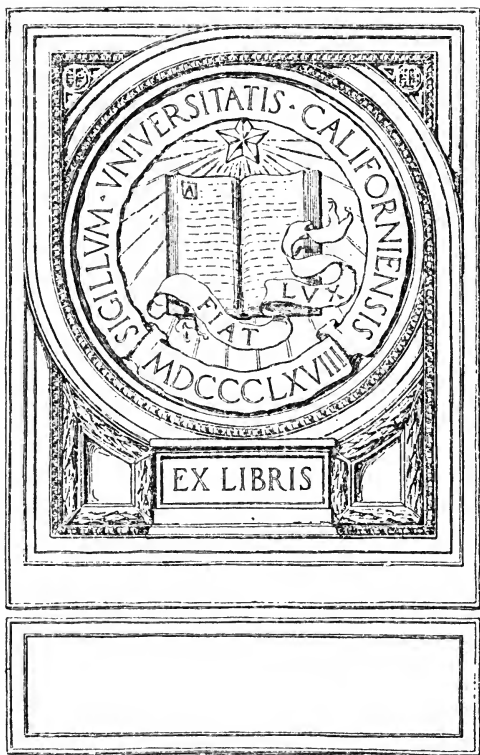


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# GRAND FLEET DAYS

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# Grand Fleet Days

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON

PUBLISHERS, LONDON, E.C.

# Grand Fleet Days

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
*IN THE NORTHERN MISTS*  
*NAVAL INTELLIGENCE, ETC.*

M.T. Hainesellin  
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## I. Brooches

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ALL over the country now, but especially in the big naval ports, you may meet on your walks abroad many a pretty lass wearing one of our brooches.

No, we don't make them on board. Multifarious and astonishing as are the things produced from the various departments of a man-of-war, they do not include brooches. Our needs in this respect are supplied by an enterprising firm ashore, which knows exactly what sort of lure to spread before the simple sailorman and how to cater for his tastes.

Now I will describe to you what our brooches really are. You can get them in three forms: silver ones, at quite a small price; enamel and gilt—the style favoured by the vast majority of buyers; and, for the moneyed aristocrats of the lower deck, such as E.R.A.'s, or for any who may happen to be *very* deeply in love, there is the brooch-de-luxe, in nine-carat gold!

The design is that of the ship's crest, an appropriate emblem which at once reveals the ship's name even to a casual beholder. Naval crests, it should be remarked, have no official sanction,

and are usually the outcome of deliberations conducted when the ship first commissions by a select committee of wardroom officers, assisted by Smith's Classical Dictionary and such flights of fancy as are reached by the more imaginative brains. There is, for instance, a ship which has adopted as its crest a Scythe; you would never guess why, unless you were told that it was held imperative to work into the motto the words *vincit omnia*; and, since *amor* as subject of the sentence seemed inappropriate and *labor* was thought to be rubbing it in too hard, a compromise was effected on *tempus*. Hence the scythe.

In our own case, too, there was some slight discussion as to the choice; pedants and purists insisting that of two main alternatives the one favoured by the majority laid the ship open to the charge of being of a lesser breed. However, the lower deck took the matter out of our hands, and adopted the questionable crest, which has, at any rate, a fine blustering air about it.

The purpose for which brooches exist is, of course, that we may have Something to Send Home. Our battlefield is not like that of the soldiers, where helmets and fuses and other common objects of the countryside may be collected; consequently we are obliged to rely on base merchandise for our trophies, contenting ourselves with this reflection—that while our gifts represent no deeds of derring-do, they can at least be worn as articles of feminine adornment; whereas no really smart girl would

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## *Brooches*

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care to be seen in a necklace of Boche bullets or bracelets of copper driving-bands—unless she were an Algonquin or a Masai.

I regret to state that there are those amongst us who have sent *several* brooches, each one accompanied by protestations of undying devotion; but I suppose the old traditions of the Navy have to be maintained.

Few things seem at first sight further apart than Love and Political Economy; yet these brooches of ours, designed to foment the tender sentiment, had also an effect closely connected with the Un-sentimental Science. Our high-explosive member was greatly incensed when he first caught sight of these trinkets; to water down his remarks, he raged at the idea of sailors wasting so much money in war-time. "How much money do you think went out of the ship last month, spent all on these unspeakable atrocities? Forty pounds! Forty pounds that might have been spent in War Loan!"

"But," came the inevitable counter-attack, "the forty pounds have not vanished into thin air; the tradesman who gets them can still put them into War Loan if he likes. And meanwhile he is giving employment to a certain number of workpeople."

"*Exactly!* People who ought to be making munitions or working in the fields!"

"But suppose they are too old for such work, or incapacitated in any way for it—isn't it better to give them work of this sort than that they

should become a burden on charity or on the State?"

Was the Ghost of Harriet Martineau looking down upon us, I wonder? If so, she must have longed to work us into one of her fascinating Tales! We badly needed some such a guide to help us out of our quagmire. But then, wardroom discussions upon questions of Political Economy—yes, we often play with such things—always land us in a like position; and, as far as that goes, I think we are no worse off than those experts who speak at meetings, and write in the newspapers.

But I *do* remember that one of the first and most important principles to remember is that there is a great distinction between Productive and Unproductive Labour. And since our brooches produce so much satisfaction in the givers, so much tender kindness in the recipients, who shall dare to say that the labour spent on them is Unproductive?

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## *II. The Socialist.*

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THE great wonder was that he should ever have come into the Navy at all; but I think that the Prime Cause must have told him that She wouldn't be seen walking out with him unless he got into uniform; and that he might choose between becoming a Fighting Man and getting another girl. Probably, also, his creed teaching him that the Army consists of a Brutal and Licentious soldiery officered by Toffs, he decided that a man of his democratic principles would have a better time in the Navy.

Or it may be that with a fine self-sacrifice he had judged it his duty to come and preach the gospel of Syndicalism to an ignorant and deluded class of society; hoping to find in the simple sailors a fruitful field for his labours. Whatever his motive, Thomas Paine Higginbotham joined us, early in the war, in the capacity of a stoker. His history during the ensuing eighteen months or so is of such interest that I propose to tell it now.

On the first occasion of his entering the stokehold he seized the opportunity of beginning the good work; a grinning crowd of "fellow-toilers," to use his own term, listened with feelings as mixed as his

own metaphors while he explained to them that they had allowed their birthright to be immolated under the mocking heel of gilded tyrants. "You are," he said, "a set of mercenary slaves bending beneath the iron wheel of a selfish despotism—" "And if *you* don't bend to that there iron shovel, my lad," said the Chief Stoker at this point, "you'll get another one just like *this*!" Whereat our Socialist rubbed the seat of his trousers with many sore reflections; among which was the astonished consideration that the Chief Stoker, himself one of the horny-handed sons of toil, could be found willing to uphold the despotic system which forced manual labour upon a man well qualified to be an intellectual guide amongst his fellows.

Still, he consoled himself with the thought that his remarks might bear fruit. He allowed them to mature for a week before attempting any further sowing of the seed. This time the Chief Stoker was not in the immediate neighbourhood, or, as Thomas Paine Higginbotham expressed it, not "a-spyin' and eavesdroppin' in that contemptible manner." He had, therefore, a freer hand, and held forth for a good ten minutes upon the Rights of Man, and the tyrannous habits of the upper classes. When he had thoroughly warmed to his subject he fixed his eye with that magnetic glance that had so often held his audience in the United Sons of Freedom club-room, fixed it upon another stoker who appeared one of the most interested listeners. "You, my brother," said he, "are

toiling and moiling here below, while they gilded popinjays of officers are all wallowing in idleness ! O, my Brother, why do you suffer such things to be ? ”

“ Was it me you was addressin’ of yerself to as your Brother ? ” asked the other stoker.

“ It was ! ” said Higginbotham.

“ Then, take that, you misbegotten son of Ham,” said the other, planting a brawny fist upon the magnetic eye ; “ and don’t ye ever insult me agin by calling me a brother to such a little lop-eared gas-bag as you be ! Brother, indeed ! I’ve got three brothers, two in the Navy and one in the Army, and any one of them would scorn to soil his hands by usin’ you to mop up muck with ! ”

All this time we had been in harbour. When we went to sea Higginbotham’s progress advanced another stage. He was violently seasick. “ Well, supposin’ you are ? ” asked one of his callous messmates ; “ you’re no worse off than the Captain. *He* gits sick every time we puts to sea ; yet there he is up on the bridge wastin’ good vittles as fast as he puts ’em down, but stickin’ to his job, same as you’ve got to ! ”

It was certainly a revelation, to hear that one of the Gilded Tyrants should suffer the same discomforts as an ordinary stoker, and from that moment Higginbotham began to feel more kindly disposed towards the race of Oppressors. But he professed himself too ill to carry on with his work, and was taken to the Sick-Bay and nursed with as much

care and attention as if he had been a Gilded Tyrant himself. The Fleet Surgeon addressed him as "My boy," and spun him a long yarn about his own sufferings when he first came to sea, assuring him that he would get over the tendency in time; talking, all the time, as Man to Man.

Cheered by this treatment, Higginbotham actually made an effort next day to struggle back to work, although he still felt very unwell. He found that there had been some slight defect in the engine-room which had given a good deal of trouble; and the grimy man in dirty overalls against whom he stumbled cursed him roundly for a clumsy lout, being a little short-tempered after having been twenty-four consecutive hours at work trying to put things right; this tired, grease-stained toiler was none other than the Engineer Lieutenant-Commander, as Higginbotham discovered to his further surprise.

Weeks and months passed. I will not attempt to follow every separate step of Higginbotham's education, but will skip till we come to the final stage. We thought we were going into action one day. Higginbotham found himself one of a thousand men all inspired with precisely the same wish; all liable to the same dangers, and all working in their various jobs as laboriously as himself.

"And what d'ye think o' Soshierlism now?" asked his friend who had once for a season closed his magnetic optic.

Higginbotham drew himself up like a man, and



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## *The Socialist*

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he spat into the open furnace before closing the door.

“Socialism,” he began——

But on second thoughts I will not risk corroding my iridium-pointed nib with what he said about Socialism. ♪

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### III. Light Cruisers

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A MAN called Emerson once took the trouble to write a long essay on the subject of Compensations, pointing out that what you lose on the swings you generally make up on the roundabouts.

That is the worst of essays; they heave and strain themselves like a fly on a sheet of tanglefoot just to tell you something you knew perfectly well already.

But if I am not careful, this will turn into an Essay on Essays; and *Ex ore tuo* will be my well-deserved reproof.

What I was going to say really is that Emerson could not have found a better example for his "Compensations" than the Light Cruiser—if such a thing had existed in his day; but he knew only its prototypes, the frigate and the brig, and there must have been very few compensations attached to life aboard those craft.

For that matter, life in a Light Cruiser isn't all beer and skittles. The smaller vessels of this type can disport themselves quite as unpleasantly as any destroyer, and are very little more comfortable to live in, yet do not get the solace of "Hard-

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## *Light Cruisers*

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lying money." Item, being small, they do not stand much of a chance should they happen to sit on a mine, and being unarmoured they are liable to be turned into scrap iron by a single salvo from the enemy's guns.

Mines and projectiles, however, can be taken philosophically, like bankruptcy and appendicitis; unpleasant things, but they don't come along every day and may not happen at all. The minor evils of life are always far more trying than its great disasters, especially if they remain present continuously; on the whole, Charles the First found it more tolerable to lose his head than to have it addled by House of Commons speeches; and the majority of people could more easily resign themselves to red ruin and the breaking up of laws than to a red nose and the breaking out of pimples. So, in the case of the Light Cruiser, one of the chief drawbacks is being obliged to live continuously with a very small number of fellow-men in a very small space, and never being able to get away from them. This applies to all ships in some degree, since the biggest ship afloat is not greatly superior in size to the Ark, in which eight people were considered quite sufficient; but in the small wardroom of a Light Cruiser, when the commission has lasted nearly a couple of years and leave is but a fading memory—well, no wonder if even a rescued Hun would be a welcome relief!

But now for the Compensations. "We haven't got much tonnage, but we do see life," might

well be the Light Cruiser's motto. The big ponderous battleships may console themselves with the reflection that they are the Ships that Matter, but they don't get much fun; they represent the fathers and mothers of the fleet, the solid, respectable mainstays of the family, leading a dull life in Olympian aloofness; no doubt they are indispensable, but what do they know of the joys of playing Last Across in front of motors, of chucking things at stout policemen and then running away, of bewildering elderly gentlemen with persistent questionings and practical jokes?

All these pleasures come within the purview of the Light Cruiser, which makes the lumbering German battleship the mark for six-inch and four-inch projectiles, dances merrily athwart the course of the battle-cruiser, and slyly deposits objects even more upsetting than banana-skins in the path of the unwary foe.

And even if life is made irksome by incessant patrolling, there is the satisfaction of knowing that any one of these boring naval occasions may develop into a Stunt; and then there's no knowing what may happen!

Light Cruisers resemble Light Opera in this respect, that the chorus get as good a chance as the principals; everyone's part is an important one, and contributes vitally to the success of the show. Who would have thought, for example, that the one name which stands out most prominently for honour and valour in all the Jutland Battle

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## *Light Cruisers*

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Despatch should be that of a Boy in a Light Cruiser? So long as that great sea-fight is remembered, so long also will be remembered the name of Boy Cornwell, of the *Chester*.

The old title of the "Eyes of the Fleet" pertains now almost alone to ships of this class. Cruisers of more massive tonnage having become practically line-of-battle ships, the chief part of all scouting work falls now practically entirely on the Light Cruisers.

Miles ahead of the main fleet, ahead also of the armoured cruisers, they speed towards the advancing enemy to glean what information they may of his movements and the composition of his forces. At great risk to themselves they carry out this essential work, because they are far from their supports.

They get into touch; their wireless buzzes out the invaluable news; they turn now, their errand effected, and make their way back with what speed they may. Or else they find opposing cruisers and destroyers coming against them and are able to put up a little scrap on their own.

Yes, they have their compensations, certainly! I do not know whether there should be reckoned amongst these the fact that they do not generally carry chaplains.

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#### IV. The Sailor's Sister

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THE exclamation of one of our lieutenants, toiled with works of war and longing after the fleshpots of Egypt, awoke many thoughts in my mind; "I say," he cried, "when this war is over—*shall we all be allowed to strafe Lloyd George again?*"

Ah, how sweet, too bitter sweet, to recall those memories, hopes, and loves of finished years! What fun it used to be to let drive at the "Little Welsh Attorney"! Such joys come now only in the speaking silence of a dream!

There was another Nursery Game of those happy far-off days, a game called Votes for Women. You used to take sides—it was great sport! But it made you awfully hot, that was the worst of it; and sometimes those who played it got too rough. You only had to have one thing, called a Vote, to play it with; or else you didn't have it, and then you had to try to get it from the other side.

Will that game be revived again, I wonder? They say that in certain circles even Ping-Pong—

Well, if it does come into fashion again, I know who can have *my* Vote, if she wants it; yes, and if she chooses to hold out her pinny she can get

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## *The Sailor's Sister*

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it filled with them; for every one in the Navy will certainly give anything she asks for to—the Sailor's Sister.

To give her her proper official designation, she is a member of Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service; but who on earth is going to call her all that? "Sister" is quite good enough for us, and "Sister" she always is and always will be to the officer and the seaman who have the bad luck to get ill or wounded, but the good luck to be nursed back to health under the care of the Ministering Angel, Naval Pattern, Mark One—that is, "Sister."

Once I was shipmates with her for three whole years. Not at sea—alas! the stern regulations of the Navy do not allow her to form part of the complement of the ordinary man-of-war; though since the war started she has gone afloat in Hospital Ships; where I met her was in a Stone Frigate—that is to say, a Naval Shore Establishment, and therefore my knowledge and my admiration are founded upon experience.

I met her busied about her ordinary work, without any limelight of popular adulation to lighten her. I met her on duty, tired out with walking the stone corridors and ward floors at the end of a trying day in a hot summer; I met her in her off-duty time, ready for a picnic, a dance, tennis, or anything that might come along. And in the dead of night, too, at the bedside of a dying man. On each occasion, under all circumstances,

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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Sister showed herself—how can I express it?—equal to all the demands made of her; keenly attentive to duty, a thorough Sport, full of tenderness and sympathy, full of common-sense and human kindness.

And full of knowledge, also. For, mark you, the Sailor's Sister is not of that class to whom applies the now war-worn jest, "If you please, Sister, I'm too ill to be nursed this afternoon." There is nothing of the amateur about her; very much the contrary, in fact. Other kinds of Sisters and Nurses may be untrained or partly trained; but the young lady aspirant for the Naval Nursing Service must begin by going through a hospital training; she must remain at this for four years; and she must become properly qualified and certificated; after that, she may get taken on in the Navy.

Or—she may not.

The Sailor's Sister in war-time has had many ordeals to face; when the wounded have been brought in, and all the beds in the hospital were not enough for the number of patients, and twenty-four hours all too short for one day. She worked against time, coping with cases that could profitably have employed six of her, forgetting all about those two hours off-duty time which all properly constituted authorities consider absolutely essential to a nurse's health, forgetting almost to eat and drink, sleeping in snatches, forgoing her own comfort, unmindful of her own needs. In not a



few cases she has left her tired body to rest beneath a foreign soil; and the Ocean has reached out its arms and taken her, bidding her sleep and end her labours.

It has not been my fortune to see her—only to hear of her—during these months of strain and stress. In less troublous days, perhaps the most wonderful thing to note about her was that a dozen of her could live in one house without quarrelling and without going into hysterics.

As this is, in a sense, a "Woman's Page" of my Note-Book, it will not be complete without some reference to the important subject of Dress; for this Sister of ours, though she's but a lassie, yet she's in the Navy too, and must have a naval uniform. This is, appropriately, of navy blue, with a short shoulder-cape. And in summer-time, or on foreign stations with a warm climate, she wears the most bewitching uniform ever devised; it is of white drill, and the white shoulder-cape has a border of bright red, a narrow piping for those of lower degree and a band about an inch in width for Head Sisters. On the head is worn a white coif, or wimple, or whatever you call the thing. My powers of description fail at this point.

But what a falling off is there in the hideous and (I'm sure it must be) uncomfortable evening dress uniform, invented only a short time back, an atrocity of bright blue silk, buttoned up to the neck! Imagine the feelings of a poor girl doomed to wear this dreadful garb in a hot room when all

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## Grand Fleet Days

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the others are happy in their pretty, airy chiffons and taffetas—(is taffetas right?).

For the miserable gentleman at the Admiralty who invented this unhappy costume the most appropriate Curse I can think of is: May all the infections which the sun sucks up from bogs, fens, flats, upon him fall and make him by inchmeal a disease; and may there be no Naval Sister at his side to cheer and restore him. Serve him jolly well right!

The following verses were sent by an anonymous reader to the author. It will be seen that he has taken her advice.

"Padre, do not think me cheeky, that I dare to send this scrawl  
To a sporting Grand Fleet Chaplain whom I do not know at all.  
Often has the fancy seized me—often have I seized my pen—  
Muttered to myself most fiercely, pacing up and down my den,  
Saying, 'I will write a letter, stating clearly what I think,'  
But my courage always failed me—till at last I took to drink!  
And I wooed the fiery nose-paint, swallowed quarts and quarts of gin,  
Till the spirit rose within me, bade me now and here begin.  
Listen, Padre! We all love you. Yes, we often say you're 'It!'  
When in Saturday's *Westminster* we peruse your cheery chit.  
We adore you! (Padre, Padre, do not frown and do not blush—  
We'd say more if space permitted and it didn't sound like gush.)  
But methinks my mind is wandering. I must pull myself together;  
What I really want to know is—will you please consider whether  
You could not select some note sheets, have them bound by hook  
or crook,  
(Better still by — or —), they would make a topping book.  
I've heard lots of people say so, land-lubbers and sailors true,  
And your notes have often cheered me when I felt most awful blue.  
So prithee, Padre, don't refuse me, but bring out that notebook, do!  
Though I'm but a wee bit lassie, sure I'm in the Navy too."

*Some Sailor's Sister Susie.*

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### V. Conversation Lollies

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THEY are those flat white things, very hard, and strongly flavoured with peppermint; the word "Lollies" is used here as a tribute to the brave Anzacs, since it is universally employed in Australasia to describe what our effete civilisation knows as "Sweets."

Conversation Lollies have various legends imprinted on them in a ravishing shade of pink; each separate inscription is very interesting in its own particular way; but, in spite of the claim inherent in the Lollies' name, I am inclined to think that a conversation conducted by means of these tablet inscriptions must be a little disconnected. "*My heart is ever thine*" may conceivably be an appropriate reply to "*Do you like sweet two-lips?*" but it is difficult to see what bearing "*Get out and get under*" has upon "*True love can never die.*"

I am frequently reminded of these Conversation Lollies by the wisps and tattered ends of talk which are carried about on the air of the Ante-Room when a number of us are gathered there during one of those stand-easy times of the day when each man's job of work is over for a while;

when all the settees are packed, and the weight of four officers sitting upon the rickety card-table seriously threatens the health of its one remaining sound leg; when there is a continual coming and going, and the sound of the closing skylights and hatches adds still more to the difficulty of listening—though no one bothers much about listening, and the speakers themselves do not care greatly whether anyone listens or not. Discourse is carried on in the midst of a perfectly dreadful frowst, which is only made bearable by intincturing it with clouds of baccy-smoke. In the midst of it all there are those who sit raptly oblivious, playing chess or reading; and others, again, appear to think it a suitable occasion for bursting into song. Sometimes the promiscuous interchange of conversation lollies gives astonishing results.

For my own part, I was reading,—

The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,  
Stared, where upon their heads the cornice rests,  
With hair blown back, and wings put crosswise on their  
breasts.

“They wept,” said a voice at my side; “they wept like anything to see such quantities of sand!” He chanted rather than spoke these words, and infused the deepest fervour into his impassioned recital—“they wept like *anything*” —“such *quantities* of sand!” But I cannot tell you the cause of his spirited monologue any more than I could understand at the moment why my eager-eyed angels should weep at the sight of sand.

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## Conversation Lollies

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"I was Officer of the Day," broke in another voice, "and the Carpenter brought the man up before me for chucking his hand in—the chap had got a moan about some silly thing or other, and refused to do any more work."

"What was he supposd to be doing?"

"Why the Carpenter gave him an order to clear away the wood that was stacked on top of the superstructure——"

"Do you suppose, the Walrus said, that *they* could get it clear? I *doubt* it, said the Carpenter."

"And the Carpenter cursed him for being a clumsy, careless swab, and told him to keep his eyes on his job, and not be always gazing about in every direction."

Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require  
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

"Then the fellow apparently gave him a bit of back-chat, and the Carpenter brought him up before me. I asked him what he had to say for himself, and all he said was that the Carpenter had no right to be after miscalling after him and using langwidge to him."

"And what did the Carpenter say to that?"

"The Carpenter said nothing but 'The butter's spread too thick.'" This was from the rapt reciter at my side, who took a singular pleasure, I do not know why, in burbling aloud those immortal verses. From a little group in the far corner came borne on the clouds—of tobacco

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## Grand Fleet Days

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smoke—the voices of some interested onlookers who were loquaciously playing the game of two chess enthusiasts hidden somewhere within the ring of bystanders.

“He ought to have taken the Knight.”

“No, he oughtn’t! Black would have had him in two moves if he did that.”

“Not a bit of it! Look here, now—White sacrifices the pawn, and the next time he gets a castle, *and* a better position!”

“Well, dry up, and let him play his own game; don’t keep on buzzing away like——”

Let no buzz’d whisper tell.

“—Ah, that’s it! Black’s going to get it in the neck now all right!”——

A hundred swords

Will storm his heart, Love’s feverous citadel.

“If you *wouldn’t* mind,” spake one of the exasperated players, with acid politeness, “we could play this game considerably better if just a few of you were to run away and play; we don’t mind two or three of you, but——”

“We cannot do with more than four, to give a hand to each——”

“So as he wouldn’t listen to reason, I put him in the Commander’s report.”

“If he goes there, he’ll be in check. He can’t do it.”

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## Conversation Lollies

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“ Luckily the Commander himself came along at that moment——”

Ah, happy chance ! the aged creature came,  
Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand.

“ Much better if he were to take the pawn. If he doesn't, he stands a very fair chance of losing his queen——”

“ That *would* be a *dismal* thing to do ! ”

“ Well,” broke in a new voice at this juncture, “ what about this mess-meeting we are going to hold ? Let's have it now—everybody seems to be here—who's away ? anybody ? ”

They are all here to-night,

I read ; and as the words seemed so appropriate I could not refrain from reading them aloud before closing my book—

They are all here to-night, the whole bloodthirsty race !

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## VI. Gentleman Jim

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THE white flower of a blameless life is all very well in its way; but there is no need to keep flaunting it in the buttonhole of your coat.

This moral maxim had not been included in the education of James Holroyd, who joined us some time ago as a temporary Writer, and consequently he did not harmonise with his environment.

Quite a large number of things shocked James on his first arrival. His finer feelings were inexpressibly jarred when he saw the people in his mess eating their meals by the simple aid of a clasp-knife and their fingers. "Are we not supplied with suitable table-appointments?" he inquired.

"With *wot*?"

"With appropriate implements; with regular feeding-utensils."

"Aw, I see what yer drivin' at! Ho, yuss, we gets a knife, fork, and spoon—but don't let me catch you a-usin' of 'em, that's all! Them things has got to be kept clean for mustering at inspection, and I'm not goin' to risk any of 'em goin' adrift!"

It was the Petty Officer of his mess that gave



him this information; a coarse soul, whose fingernails were always very black, though not so black as James's estimate of his character. "A man of no refinement, with whom I cannot feel any sympathetic affinity whatever," he described him in a letter. The letter was written on scented paper of a pale mauve tint, bought privately ashore. Only when a petty officer's picnic took place a little time later did Holroyd begin to perceive that character is a many-sided affair; the cutter was under sail, and James Holroyd, sitting idle in the stern-sheets, and feeling a little nervous, was unable to help admiring the masterly way in which Huggins, the petty-officer of his own mess, managed the boat, and assumed a dignified yet cheery command of the voluntary crew, who were all men of his own standing, yet obeyed his orders implicitly. Also, when the picnic-party proceeded to bathe, Huggins devoted the whole of his time in endeavouring to teach James to swim. Swimming was an accomplishment which the youth had never thought worth acquiring before, and he proved rather a stupid and slow pupil, but Huggins, a magnificent swimmer, was very patient and goodnatured, and encouraged him to go on trying.

Of course his messmates dubbed him Gentleman Jim from the start, and he was rather proud than otherwise of the appellation.

"Such is the ideal I have always made it my aspiration to live up to," he declared, "and to my mind there can be no higher title!" "Swank,"

replied his hearers, and one of them muttered unkindly, "Cut it out!"

"I feel very greatly my loneliness amongst hundreds of heartless men," he wrote home about this time, "and do so pine for some congenial society, and for some intellectual pastimes with kindred spirits."

One cannot help feeling a little sorry for poor Holroyd at this stage.

Another thing that pained him grievously was the entire lack of privacy on board ship. Hitherto he had lived the very much sheltered life, but he found his new abode slightly different in this respect. One morning he was told to take a certain memo. to a lieutenant, and having reached the cabin he knocked gently on the bulkhead—and then discovered by the noise of splashing that the officer behind the curtain was having his bath! "Come in!" shouted the lieutenant; but James hesitated on account of his natural modesty. "*Come in*, I say," bawled the voice again; "what the deuce are you standing out there for? You're not a perishing *lady's-maid*, are you?" And James entered, suffused with blushes, while the entirely unabashed young giant of a lieutenant stood over him naked and dripping wet to sign the papers. But when poor Holroyd learnt that the bathing arrangements of the lower deck entailed upon himself an even higher degree of publicity, he was so overcome that he was for refraining from the bath altogether, until a sage moralist taught

him, "Houtward happearances ain't nothin' to go by, me lad; it's them what *thinks modest*, as is modest indeed!"

So, little by little, knowledge began to sink into Holroyd's soul. I do not say that some finer instincts were not blunted a little in the process, and the bloom of innocence rubbed somewhat bare in places; that is the pity of it, that with the clearing off of the glaring varnish overlaid on the work of an "old master" you run the risk of injuring the true surface as well; and especially is this true with regard to the work of the greatest Master of all, when you try to clear away the rubbishy coating of vulgarity overlaid on a human soul. So let all men beware how they take in hand the improvement of anyone they affect to despise.

But, on the whole, the process was for the good in James's case. There is much that is regrettable about naval life, no doubt, but there is a great deal more that is truly admirable and noble. And when James Holroyd goes back into civil life again he may, possibly, be a little less of a "gentleman," in the opinion of his former friends; but he will certainly be much more of a Man!

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## VII. *The Orca*

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LITERARY comparisons must always be matters of opinion; but, to my thinking, the Rime of the Ancient Mariner is left streets behind by the narrative which I now propose to unfold. This story is in a different class altogether, and the best that Poet Coleridge's yarn can hope for is to be ranked "With but After." Here also is the final solution of that which has always been an admitted mystery—the personality and motive of the Ancient Mariner himself.

Let these matters wait, however, for a moment, while I first introduce the officer who is at once the hero and the narrator of the monumental sea-epic of *The Orca*.

To tell you all about him would take too long; his Life has yet to be written, comprising innumerable adventures in every part of the world, and all of them Absolutely True. He entered the Merchant Service at an early age, and therein spent an eventful career, the tamest experience of it being blown by a gale stern first through the Magellan Straits. But I do not purpose recounting his other adventures, though the incident of "The Head Baboon's

Wife," and the amazing story of the "Tanjong Pagar Princess," not to mention the tale of the "Gharry-horse and the Lift," might well be worth telling at some future time. For the present it is sufficient to state that he blew in amongst us with all the romance of the Seven Seas clinging to him, still trailing clouds of glory from his previous existence as the Brightest Jewel in the British-India.

Enough of this; my leaden words shall yield place to his golden ones, and without further preface the story of *The Orca* shall now begin.

"We were lying at Dunedin at the time. Know Dunedin? Pretty place—but we didn't think about the beauties of scenery and architecture; all our attention was devoted to the beauties of food! You see, we had been marooned at Stewart Island for two solid months without food and without clothes—"

"Why, how did that happen?"

"Oh, we put there to refit, after being knocked about by a gale in the Antarctic, went ashore, bathed, tide rose, boat and all our clothes drifted out to sea, and, well, there we were, stranded!"

"Couldn't you swim off to the ship?"

"*Swim off?* Man alive, you don't know what the sharks are like in those waters! Three poor fellows tried it, and all got taken before our very eyes! All by the same shark too. We soon got to recognise him; the brute used to come every day after that and lie just off the beach, waiting

for us ; and at last, when he saw we weren't taking any, he turned nasty, and just tried to rile us by—you'd never guess ! ”

“ No, how ? ”

“ Why, he knew we hadn't got any clothes—of course, he had seen them all floating around in the water ; so, just out of spite and mockery, he came one morning and stuck his head up out of the water, waving in his jaws a pair of trousers he had picked up ! ”

“ No ! ”

“ Absolutely true, I give you my word ! They were *my* trousers too—I recognised them by a blue patch in the seat, where a piece had been torn out when I was being chased by a tiger in the Sunderbunds.”

“ You never told us about that ! How did you escape from the tiger ? ”

“ Why, just at the moment when he nearly got me, and tore the piece out of my trousers, I shinned up a tree, and, after being there two hours, I made a noose with my belt and lassoed him by the tail ; I hauled heavy till his hind-quarters were well clear of the ground and kept him like that till he died from the rush of blood to the head.”

“ But you're getting away from the other story. How did you manage to evade the sharks at last ? ”

“ Oh, wash out the sharks ! I was telling you about what happened at Dunedin. Our men were so hungry that nothing would stop them from

killing and eating everything they could see. One day there was a great Orca swimming around the ship——”

“A Great Auk, did you say?”

“No, stupid! The Great Auk was extinct years ago; I shot the last one myself. This was an Orca, with three of her young swimming close to her. Well, the cook’s mate—I tried to stop him, but wasn’t quick enough—was fool enough to harpoon one of the young ones! I knew there would be trouble, and told him so; but he only laughed at me!”

“Well, why shouldn’t he laugh? He got what he was fishing for, didn’t he?”

“He got a jolly sight more than that! He didn’t see the pilot-fish swimming with the Orca. *I did!* Seven of them there were! And—would you believe it?—those seven pilot-fish followed us when we left Dunedin, and stuck to us the whole voyage! When we got to Falmouth I looked over the side, and sure enough there they were still! And with us they remained on the next voyage. In spite of the fact that when we put into San Francisco the captain got knifed ashore, and three of the deck-hands died of dysentery, and the bo’sun ran—he became a Tammany Boss afterwards, I heard. And three more were washed overboard in a squall, and the second mate went loony through sleeping in the moonlight in the tropics. And another man suddenly got religion—so *he* wasn’t any durned use aboard a sailing-ship, of course!

In fact, various misfortunes overtook us, until, by the time we had finished our outward voyage, there were none of the original lot left, except the cook's mate and myself. And all the time those pilot-fish had followed us !

"Well, we fetched up at last. In Dunedin again. And no sooner had we dropped killick than I noticed those pilot-fish dart ahead and disappear—for ever !"

"Well, what about it ? That isn't very exciting!"

"Wait ! We lowered a boat to go ashore ; and I and the cook's mate were in it. Half a mile from the beach what should I see, to my horror, but a great bull Orca charging towards us, lashing the water furiously. We could do nothing ! The brute came on, butted into us, upsetting the boat—and made off *with the cook's mate bleeding and struggling in his jaws !*"

Now I know what the Ancient Mariner was : he was a most phenomenal old—well, let's put it this way : he was a pensioned officer of the Merchant Service.



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### VIII. "*Masts and Yards*"

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I READ somewhere recently the remark of an American writer to the effect that on seeing our invalided sailors lodged in a Naval Hospital bearing an inscription dating from the time of Charles II. he realised that the war is but an episode in British naval history.

There are several other details of a similar nature, which remind you that ours is not an affair of mushroom growth like the German Navy, which was inaugurated in 1848 and sold by public auction in 1864—as may very likely be its fate again, to be sold for scrap-iron this time. All sorts of traditions and survivals are closely interwoven with the present customs of the Navy, though it is very rarely that anyone takes the trouble to look into old associations of a date before Trafalgar.

For instance, you may observe in the newspaper now and again the appointment of a Naval Chaplain to a Living in the gift of the Admiralty. There are eight of these Livings, all situated in one district of Northumberland. Certainly, the connexion between these out-of-the-world North-Country parishes and the Admiralty is not at first obvious; but it dates from the time of the Old Pretender,

amongst whose misguided followers was the Earl of Derwentwater, the owner of large estates in Northumberland; the Earl was attainted, and his estates all confiscated; the Livings being put in trust of Greenwich Hospital for presentation to ex-Naval Chaplains. A very laudable act, and one which might be repeated with advantage. Are there any British estates owned, I wonder, by the present holder of the title of Duke of Cumberland; and are there any Livings attached to them?

These, however, are but modern instances; much older ones can easily be adduced. The other day I had occasion to "put in a demand" for certain books, and had to indent them from Deptford Yard; my demand-note was filed there by some clerk who goes down each morning from his house in the suburbs to his office in Deptford Yard; as his predecessors have done every day since the reign of Henry the Eighth!

But why drag in these comparatively recent times? We can go further back than these; Conscription, which to the mass of our countrymen is a modern invention, is no new thing to us, seeing that Parliament passed an Act legalising "Pressing for the King's Navy," in the reign of *Richard the Second*!

And when you leave the shore behind, with all its old-fashioned naval establishments, and step aboard a ship, you may still find yourself amid many things reminiscent of the ancient days, even though you

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## *Masts and Yards*

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seem to be standing in a vast box of highly scientific machinery that bears no more resemblance to the ships of a hundred years ago than the Riviera Express does to a stage-coach. Yet old names and old terms still survive. In your tour around the ship you visit the fore-castle—or “foxle,” as the sailor writes the word—and probably fail to remember that the name is a survival from olden days when the early wooden ships were constructed with a high castle of several storeys in the fore part of the ship, from which the bowmen might discharge their artillery. You may have seen an illustration of the *Great Harry*, with a good example of what the fore-castle once was.

As ships were then built, there was also an “after-castle” at the other end; and it is interesting to note that although this name has yielded place to the term “quarter-deck,” yet the modern sailor still cuts AXLE upon the wooden buckets appropriated to the quarter-deckmen’s use.

The official expression relative to the departure of a ship still speaks of her date of *sailing*; and there are many other such terms which trace their origin back to the days of “Masts and Yards,” when “the weather gauge” was an important advantage over an enemy—as important as “taking the wind out of her sails” in a race with a friendly competitor.

“Mast and Yards,” as an expressive term, has come to symbolise “Old Navy” ideas and ways. With many more senior officers, *laudatores temporis*

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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*acti*, it is an article of faith that "it was a bad day for the Navy when masts and yards were done away with."

Indeed, the day of their doom was not so very long ago; few are the officers of Commanders rank and above who have not been shipmates with "Masts and Yards" in their earlier years. Not, of course, in ships where sails were the only means of propulsion, but in composite ships, principally of the "Down-funnel-up-screw" type; in which there was a telescopic arrangement allowing the funnel to be lowered beneath the deck, and a contrivance for clearing the screw-propeller out of the way at such times as a good sailing-breeze sprang up.

One such "Masts and Yards" officer was shipmates with me once, as First Lieutenant: and, being in company with an American man-of-war, he held forth at length on the subject of modern degeneracy and the good old days of "Masts and Yards." But the United States officer, listening, gave no approval to his ideas; tapped him reprovingly on the shoulder, and cut short the argument with the remark, "*Young feller, I guess you're too young to grow barnacles!*"

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## *IX. An Old-Time Captain*

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**A**S a ledger-keeper, James Quill, Chief Writer, was irreproachably perfect ; his accuracy could always be relied on, his figures were faultlessly neat. Under stress of work, as, for instance, towards the end of the quarter, he was the one man who could be trusted to remain working in the ship's office till three in the morning, if necessary, without complaint and without diminishing in the slightest degree the general excellence of his work. He was steady and industrious ; every month he used to allot £8 to his wife, and he never wanted to go ashore. Leave for chief petty officers might be piped every day, but James Quill was not amongst those who would touch a respectful forelock and ask to be allowed to set foot upon the land. With one chronic exception. A strict teetotaller at other times, he would land regularly once in every three months and get quietly drunk, all by himself, returning to the ship in that problematical condition which causes a worried officer-of-the-watch to look hard at a man coming up over the gangway, and, seeing that he is able to hold himself straight and walk quietly away to his mess, decide to say nothing about it this time. Next morning,

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## Grand Fleet Days

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James Quill would be punctually at his work, as exact and painstaking as ever, the prop and mainstay of the office, quiet and unobtrusive, seldom speaking to anyone except to warn the Third Writer against the evils of drink, until the time came round for him to indulge in his private orgy once more.

It was after one of these outbreaks that he unbosomed himself to me. He seemed to be in a mood at once penitential and reminiscent. "Ah, Sir," he said, "I was not always like this !"

"No ?" I replied, waiting for further confidences to follow.

"No, Sir; I was in a very different position to what I am now. I was a captain, once."

Now that I came to think of it, I had often heard people address him as Captain; but nicknames are so frequent on the lower-deck, and their origin often so abstruse and involved that they come to be accepted without inquiry. But on his making mention of it himself, I immediately formed a mental picture of James Quill in earlier days wearing a red jersey, and, perhaps, playing a cornet.

"In the Salvation Army, I suppose ?" said I; though I knew him to be at present a staunch Wesleyan.

"No, Sir. Not that sort of captain. I was a *proper* captain—captain of a battleship."

"Indeed !" I began to wonder whether the Chief

Writer was still "under the influence," or whether his brain was becoming affected. But I noticed his companions quietly smiling to themselves as if they had heard him say this sort of thing before.

"Yes, Sir, I commanded the old *Penelope* once upon a time."

I remembered the old *Penelope*, at a time when she had reached her latter days and was swinging to a buoy in Simon's Bay; a fine ship in her time; she took part in the bombardment of Alexandria.

"But, Quill, you weren't in the Service in the 'eighties?" I queried.

"Oh, bless you, Sir," he answered, "I weren't allooding to *that Penelope*! I was cap'n of the *Penelope* in Nelson's fleet—a fine, oak-built, three-masted line-o'-battle ship. It was in a preevious existence, you must understand! An' that's what reconciles me to be a-sittin' here on a high stool adding up figures at the beck an' call of every young 'arf-fledged assistant-clurk—I casts back me mind to the days when I used to walk the quarter-deck in white silk knee-breeches, a-cursin' and a-swearin' at all the orficers and living like a lord in me own cuddy aft."

I understood. His was not by any means a singular case. Either he had got hold of some crank theosophical book, or—well, you never know how these fancies arise, and the Navy is a fine soil for the culture of freak ideas; does not Marryat

record a similar case in his Gunner who believed in a recurring cycle of sixty-odd thousand years?

"Ah!" went on the Chief Writer, "those were the days! We used to have a sea-fight about once a week, then! None of your hanging about watching for an enemy what wouldn't show himself in those times! Why, I myself have sunk so many as three ships in a week! Nelson, he often used to say to me, 'Beauchamp,' says he——"

"Then you were not called Quill in that existence?" I put in.

"No, Sir, I was Captain the Honourable Lord Visscount Beauchamp. 'Look 'ere,' says Nelson; 'Beauchamp, me boy, you knows them three Frenchy frigates a-lying doggo inside Quiberon Bay? Well, I wants 'em cut out, and there's nobody I can trust to do it but you—a pack of silly, idle, good-for-nothin,' useless sons of Ham those other skippers are '——'"

"But I thought," I interjected, "that Nelson had the highest opinion of all his captains? Didn't he call them 'a band of brothers'?"

"Ah, he 'ad to say things like that for the outside public! But you should ha' heard him slinging off at 'em to *me*! Why, just before the battle o' Cape St. Vincent——"

"But, surely, that was Rodney's engagement, not Nelson's, wasn't it?"

"Ah, that's what the 'istory-books tell you—pack o' lies, for the most part, they are! Well, as I was tellin' you, Sir——"



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## *An Old-Time Captain*

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“ *Quill!* ” resounded piercingly from the adjoining office, where the Fleet-Paymaster was working.

The ex-Captain gathered up a sheaf of papers and made for the door. “ But I was not always like this, Sir,” he remarked plaintively as he departed. “ I was a captain once, a *proper* captain ! ”

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## *X. White and Gold*

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**E**XECUTIVE officers of a type happily very rare have been known to remark before now, "Let me get to a small ship, where there isn't so much red, white, and blue!" This cryptic utterance does not refer, as you might imagine, to the Union Jack or the White Ensign, but to the colours between the gold stripes on the sleeves of non-executive officers; red for the doctor's branch, blue for naval instructors, and white for paymasters.

Now, a young lieutenant in full bodily health and crammed full of knowledge might conceivably rub along quite well in the absence of both doctor and naval instructor, but I would defy him, or anybody else on board ship, to exist for a single day without the assistance of the Accountant Branch. "The Accountant Officer" is the official title for the incarnate Providence who wears the white stripes between his gold lace; but we always know him by the affectionate title of "Pay"; in more familiar mood we occasionally address him as "Pusser," which of course, means purser, the old title by which he was officially designated in former days. He ranges from the embryo stage

of Assistant-Clerk, though the grades of Clerk, Assistant-Paymaster, Paymaster, Staff-Paymaster, and Fleet-Paymaster, to the exalted rank of Paymaster-in-Chief, a height reached by very few indeed, at which final stage he wears four stripes on his arm and possibly a C.B. on his chest. But in each and all of these steps he is always the same genial and indispensable Friend of All the World, the mainstay of everyone in the ship from the Captain downwards.

If payment were in proportion to merit, the Accountant Officer ought to be given the free run of his own money-chest; as it is, however, he starts his career on a wage that a London errand-boy would turn up his nose at, and continues in much the same state for several years, only reaching a competence when the illusions of youth are no longer worth paying good money for to have the fun of proving them illusory.

To classify the Accountant Branch scientifically, Paymasters may be divided into two main genera—Secretary Birds and Soap-and-baccy Paymasters. The latter may again be subdivided into two species—Cash and Vittles.

Many a Flag-Officer remembers gratefully the wise guidance and help of his Secretary in difficult situations again and again; and, if he is wise, having once found a good Secretary, he will stick to him until one or the other retires from the Service.

The Soap-and-Baccy Pusser, whether his work

is confined to that of Victualling Paymaster ("Vittles"), or whether he is Borne for Accountant Duties ("Cash"), or whether, as is most usually the case in an ordinary ship, he combines the two officers in one person, is an infallible guide on all Service matters. He knows the King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions almost by heart; and, what is more, can find his way with unerring accuracy about the Regulations themselves and the Appendix as well; an accomplishment which leaves the mere Bradshaw-expert quite in the shade, since to the unlearned the main function of the Regulations seems to be to make you "See Appendix," while the Appendix keeps the joke up by telling you to "See Regulations."

It is not alone in Service matters that Pay is a wise counsellor; years of unravelling tangled problems have made him a man of sound judgment, whose advice on all other affairs is always worth asking and generally worth following. He is everybody's confidant; at one time or another every one of his messmates is pretty certain to buttonhole the Pay with the request, "Look here, old man, I wish you would give me your opinion about this; I'm dashed if *I* know what I ought to do!" And the Pay will weigh the matter in question very deliberately; he is not a man to make any hurried pronouncements. Often he will come out with some probing interrogatory that lays bare the whole difficulty; then, after further thought, he is ready with his suggestion, put very

modestly—and you can be fairly sure that it is just the right suggestion needed.

At the beginning of each month the Paymaster has a very pleasing function to perform, one which meets with such general approbation that it might with advantage be repeated much more frequently; he hands each officer a little envelope on which are printed the words “Pay or Wages,” a duplicate phrase which is far from being as meaningless as that wonderful string of such phrases in the General Confession, since it safeguards the Admiralty against the complaints of any who do not think they are being sufficiently remunerated for their services. “All right,” says the Admiralty; “don’t call it Pay, if you feel like that; just pretend you are one of the horny-handed, and call it Wages; considered *as* Wages, it’s a thumping big amount, isn’t it?”

Well, whatever it is, the Paymaster works it out for you, and for the whole of the Ship’s Company as well, and gives it to you with that punctuality and urbanity that characterise all his actions.

I hope our own Paymaster will see this last sentence, because I shall probably be coming to him for an Advance before the month is finished.

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## *XI. The Decoder's Middle Watch*

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UP on the bridge it was dark—dark as a wolf's throat, and cold—bitterly cold.

The wind was freshening, and every now and again broke into short squalls with driving sleet. A quarterly sea tended to start the ship yawing, and the lieutenant of the middle watch spoke winged words down the voice-pipe to the young able seaman at the wheel, bidding him keep her steady on her course. Then he looked up again to peer ahead into the darkness, endeavouring with practised eye to make out the white glint of the wake of the next ahead; station-keeping with all lights out on a dark night is no joke.

Suddenly he drew a sharp breath and bent quickly to the voice-pipe again. A landsman might have looked for an hour and distinguished nothing in the thick darkness of the night; but the watch-keeper saw that he was almost on top of the next ahead; he snapped out the order "Port twenty-five; one four knots"; and as the great ship swung aside out of her course and slowed gradually he muttered softly, "What a dog's life it is! Why didn't I join a branch where I could sleep comfortably in my 'ammick every night?"

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## *The Decoder's Middle Watch*

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Down below, in an office brilliant with electric light and white enamel, in an atmosphere composed of equal parts of stale tobacco-smoke and the exhaust from the engine-room, the Decoding Officer sat at his desk, with a small pile of finished signals in front of him. He looked at the rusty Bee clock which a former sharer of his labours had bequeathed to the Decoding Office; it was a quarter-past one. With an effort to keep his heavy eyelids open, he took up the remaining signals and began to deal with them. There was a cypher of eighty-seven hoists from the Senior Naval Officer at Troy Town, and a code message from a ship of the Eleventh Battle Squadron.

"All day long have I been flogging at this blessed tosh," he grumbled to himself, "and now it looks as if I'm going to make a night of it as well!"

Nearly an hour later he packed his books away with a sigh of relief, no fresh signals having been brought to him in the interval. Going across to the Wireless office, he asked, just to make sure, if there was anything waiting.

"Only these two, sir," said the operator.

The Decoding Officer inspected them. "The two Back-Chat Comedians," he remarked; "they can wait for a bit. I'm going to turn in for a bit now."

He went back to his office and tried the steel safe and the drawers, to see if he really had locked them; and, having found them all secure, ducked

beneath the rows of hammocks and made his way to his cabin, where he was quickly in his bunk.

But sleep would not come. The pillow was hot and the blanket *would* come and tickle his face. He turned and tossed, and presently sat up and said half-aloud, "Now, *did* I try that steel chest before I left?"

His forehead wrinkled as he tried hard to remember, and then, "Yes, of course I did," he said. "What an ass I am!" as he lay down again.

"I'm not so sure about it, though," was his reflection, five minutes later.

"Better get out and see, if you're not sure," spoke Common-Sense. "It's infernally cold to get out again," answered Creature-Comfort; "besides, I *am* sure, and I want to go to sleep."

"You're *not* sure, and you'll never go to sleep till you have been to look," said Common-Sense; and, after arguing the point for five minutes more, the Decoding Officer sprang from his bunk with a censored exclamation, and padded with bare feet across the cold corticene to the office; where a vicious tug at the handles of boxes and drawers proved that Creature-Comfort had been in the right after all.

Once more he went back to his bunk, switched off the light, and at once fell asleep.

After a while he was aroused again. A signal was put into his hand. "I don't know this code at all," said he, rubbing his eyes. "'Clearsoup'?"



What on earth can that be? Oh, yes, I know! Of course, that's from the culinary code; how stupid of me not to have recognised it at once!"

Over to the office again. Once more he unlocked a drawer and dragged out the heavy Culinary Code, turning over its pages rapidly till he found the word *Clearsoup*.

"*Proceed with the utmost despatch to bombard Berlin,*" ran the translation. The Decoding Officer wrote this on a signal pad and took it to the Captain. Then he took another glance at the word in the Code-Book, and saw printed underneath it an instruction which had previously escaped his notice: "This must on no account be confused with the word *Clearhoup*." The sweat broke out on his forehead; an S is so much like an H in Morse; he *might* have made a mistake! But the trouble was that there was no such word as *Clearhoup* in the Code. "It doesn't *sound* like a Culinary word," he mused; and at that instant turned to a set of pages which he did not remember having ever seen before; at the head of the first page was the very word he was looking for! "For the meaning of *Clearhoup*," the book said, "see secret envelope A.19." The Decoding Officer seized this and tore it open, only to find *another* sealed package inside it! This one revealed yet a third, and presently he was up to his knees in torn-open envelopes, still seeking the meaning of *Clearhoup*." At last the innermost envelope revealed a tiny brass key and a slip of instruc-

tions, which said, "The starboard chronometer-case in the Wardroom wine-locker is adjustable for hypothecated instances"—which cleared up the whole situation at once. He walked along at once to the Wardroom, where he was met by the watch-keeper, who had that moment come down from the bridge.

"Hello, old chap," said the latter; "I'm dashed if you don't look as if you were walking in your sleep!"

"Course I'm not, you silly ass," replied the other indignantly—"at least, come to think of it, d'you know, I believe I must have been?"

"Well, have a drop of hot cocoa, anyway," said the watch-keeper; "I told them to have some ready; nothing like it for sending you to sleep properly. Do you know, it's after four? By Jove, I wish I could have a quiet night like you fellows!"

"Ah, well," said the Decoding Officer, sipping his hot cocoa, "we've all—we've all—we've all got trub-trub-troubles of our own!"

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## *XII. Smuggling*

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A GOOD deal of adventurous smuggling was done by men of the King's Navy in the good old days, and a certain amount of a very minor and tame description is carried on still; I have done a bit of it myself.

On the last occasion when I brought home dutiable goods from abroad, my conscience, like a silly idiot, waited till the very last moment to tell me that I really ought to make a full and honest declaration of all the goods I proposed to land. What was the consequence? My box was detained at the Custom House, I was obliged to go to the other end of the town and pay a special visit to the Head Panjandrum of Customs, and they claimed full duty on practically everything! Moral: Well, no; perhaps I had better get on with my main subject. Which deals with the smuggling experiences, not of myself, but of a messmate.

When I tell you that this officer is no less a person than the one who witnessed the terrible adventure of the Great Orca, you will be readily prepared to believe that even in the less exciting episodes of a smuggler's career his personal expe-

riences were by no means of a common order; and, mind you, they are all Absolutely True!

It is better to let him recount his adventures in his own words.

“Smuggling? Oh, yes; I did a lot of smuggling in my old merchant-service days! Made money out of it, too! I should have been a rich man to-day, if I hadn’t lost the whole lot on a foolish bet.”

“What sort of a bet?”

“Why, I laid all the money I had made by smuggling—it came to just seventeen thousand pounds—against the second mate’s half-a-crown that I could take soundings with the lead in twelve fathoms with the ship going at fourteen knots.”

“Do you honestly and actually mean to tell us that you *could* do such a thing?”

“Why, sure! I’ve done it many a time! Never used my hands to cast the lead, either; I always used to hold the line in my teeth and swing it round with my head. But—well, anyhow, this particular time I failed, just when I wanted to do it, and, as I said, it cost me twenty-three thousand pounds!”

“What you *said* was seventeen thousand; but, never mind, go on; how did you manage to bungle it?”

“I *just* missed picking up soundings; but it was not till about six months later I found out that the engine-room indicator was wrong, and

when I thought we were going seventeen knots we were actually doing seventeen and a quarter ! ”

“ Hard lines ! But what about the smuggling ? ”

“ Well, my greatest time was when I was in the old *Soona*, running to the Cape. My line was diamonds—I.D.B., you know. Really, I ran no risks at all, thanks to my little pet canary.”

“ Your canary ? ”

“ Yes. You see, I had often noticed the ostriches swallowing pebbles, and I thought to myself, if an ostrich can swallow a pebble, a canary-bird can swallow a little diamond ! So I invested in a canary and a cage, and many's the trip I made from the Cape to England with the dear little bird simply chock-a-block with diamonds ! But I was done in, at last.”

“ How ? ”

“ Why, just through my own silly greediness. Instead of being content with small profits and quick returns—the returns, by the way, were got with the aid of an emetic—I must needs invest all my savings in one big stone. I simply had to force it down the poor bird's throat, it was so enormous ! A week later the canary died ! ”

“ Well, couldn't you open the body ? ”

“ I didn't know it was dead till the idiot of a steward brought it up to me on the bridge. ‘ Your canary's dead, sir,’ he says—and with that he chucks it overboard ! I dived after it at once, but it was no good ; the weight of the diamond had taken it down immediately ! ”

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## Grand Fleet Days

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“That *was* bad luck ! And I suppose that was what made you give up smuggling ?”

“No, I didn’t quit it then ! It was—well, I’ll tell you. It happened a few years later, when I was on a different run, in a ship named the *Angostura*. I had bought three thousand cigars in India, and when we got to Antwerp I got another three thousand. And when we reached Middlesbrough I simply hadn’t the ghost of an idea how to land them. Because, you see, they search the ship pretty thoroughly at that place. No good putting things inside settee cushions or behind the engine-casings, or any simple old-time dodges of that sort ! About sixteen of the Customs’ people come on board and make a thorough search, and they don’t leave anything to chance, either !

“All at once I thought of a plan. You know, in most merchant ships the fresh-water tank is right underneath the steering-engine, just before number three hold. Well, I placed all my cigars in a tin box, strapped them on top of a lifebelt, and floated the whole concern in this tank.

“The Customs’ men searched the ship high and low, and were just going to leave, and I thought I was all right. But as they were making for the gangway I heard one of them say, ‘We might as well have a look at the fresh-water tank before we go.’

“Luckily, I overheard him ! I just had time to nip down and get into the tank ! There was about five foot of water in it. As soon as I heard

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## *Smuggling*

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their footsteps I took a deep breath and plunged beneath the water, sitting firmly on the cigars and keeping them down to the bottom of the tank.

“I could hear the voices of the Customs’ men as they looked into the tank. Of course, they could see nothing in that semi-darkness—nothing of me, I mean. But, to my horror, they did not go away ! They started an argument about Home Rule—I’ve been dead against all forms of politics ever since—and, I give you my word, it was *eleven minutes by my watch* before they went away and I was able to come up and breathe ! *That’s* what finally put me off smuggling !”

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### XIII. *Heard Melodies*

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A SHIP is not a quiet place. People whose nerves are easily set a-jangling would do well to seek their necessary peace elsewhere than in a man-o'-war, where the heard melodies are varied and well-nigh incessant and most of them by no means sweet.

At sea one naturally would scarcely expect to find quietness; to the noise of the waves and the raging of the tempest is added the monotonous clank of the engines—at least, in the older ships fitted with machinery of the pull-and-push order; the engines of a modern turbine-driven ship being practically silent in their action. Everyone who has made a voyage in a liner and has been unfortunate enough to be located in a cabin within hearing of the engines knows how maddening it is to listen to that iterated four-note melody which will insist upon fitting itself to some perfectly imbecile words; not the worst of the torture is that the melody is always an *allegro* passage, consequently inducing that feeling which makes you want to throw a boot at the head of a person who is *always* cheerful!

In harbour, however, it would seem reasonable



to expect freedom from noise. The very idea of a Haven connotes peaceful quiet and the lulling of troublous sounds. But if you think that this applies to a ship of war, I can only tell you that you have another guess.

One of those difficult sentences which you have to say quickly six times runs: "The sea ceases and it suffices us"; now, if the sea—or the voice of it—*did* cease in harbour, it *might* suffice us; but then, it doesn't! Supposing you have a cabin next to the ship's side, and there is a bit of a swell running: every few seconds a wave rolls along, swishing up the torpedo-boom outside in a loud treble run which ends in a crashing bass chord as the heel of the boom bangs against the armour with a "*wump*" that shakes everything in the cabin.

That, however, is nothing; most of the time you are in your cabin you sleep through it, and in the morning it helps you to wake up. But there are still many other harbour melodies; the greater part of them being provided by various wind and percussion instruments connected with the machinery of the ship. For although the main engines are still, there remain about two hundred auxiliary machines which are kept constantly at work.

Everywhere, for instance, can be heard the musical hum of the many electric motor fans. There is one which purrs away close to my head during Church; but as it purrs on G, I find it

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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quite useful as an aid in reciting the Service. These fans stop only on coal-ship days, when their silence is heard with quite distressing force.

Other machines combine to form a regular Toy Symphony. There is a pump which ticks in perfect imitation of a grandfather's clock; several kinds of bird-calls; a boat-hoist which gives a very perfect rendering of a saw-mill in action; another pump which imitates the castanets; while the hydraulic machinery of the turrets resembles nothing so much as an elephant trying to break loose from his cage.

Besides machinery, manual labour is responsible for much of a ship's melody. There is a Concerted Piece known as Chipping Boiler Tubes, which is part of the Harbour programme; it is really a combination of the Harmonious Blacksmith with the Brain-fever Bird; it starts at six in the morning and goes on till eleven at night, blending not infrequently with the Kaffir Piano display performed by the men who break up boxes for the engine-room fires, and the Indian Tom-Toms of the carpenter's party heaving chunks of timber about, apparently just for the fun of the thing. A sub-bass is provided by the dull boom of casks and boxes being dumped on the deck from the store-ship, and the vocal parts are supplied by call-boys, by officers giving orders or shouting for sentries and messengers, by—in short, by everybody, and usually all at once. Nor are the lesser musical adjuncts wanting; bugle-calls sound off,

roughly at two-minute intervals, and the shrill pipe of the boatswain's-mates mingles with the sonorous chime of the ship's bell.

I have lately been looking through some books on harmony, and I find that the one great salient fact in the theory of music which all the books are most fearfully keen on impressing upon you is that a Sonata may be in either the Binary or the Ternary form, and if it isn't in one of these it is no longer a Sonata but something else.

Which seems much akin to saying that an omelette can be made with either two eggs or three, and if you use more it becomes scrambled eggs.

But, I wonder, in what category must be placed the concord of sweet sounds produced by our ship-music? It isn't a Prelude—and I can assure you it isn't an Interlude! A Symphony, perhaps? Yet a Symphony seems to stand for something pleasing to the ear; and I am inclined to think that these particular melodies would be far sweeter unheard!

But I hope to get away from them soon, for a few days, and go to where beyond these voices there is peace. *Absit omen*—I only mean—on leave!

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#### *XIV. Sixteen Bells*

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**I**NSTEAD of the customary Eight Bells struck at the conclusion of every four-hour watch, it is an unwritten law of the Navy that Sixteen Bells should be struck at midnight on New Year's Eve—eight to speed the Old Year out, and eight to herald in the New.

Custom also dictates that the Quartermaster, who usually performs the office of sounding the hour, is on this occasion relieved of the duty, and the privilege of solemnly ringing out the news of the New Year's birth is given to the youngest officer in the ship.

A doubtful privilege sometimes—at any rate in these latitudes; for a snug hammock or a cosy gunroom possesses attractions at this time of night and this season of the year which are hardly balanced by the honour of going for'ard on deck to where the bell hangs beneath the fore bridge; through pitchy darkness, with a reasonable chance of barking shins against hatch-coamings, while the cold wind drives a scurry of snow or hail blinding and breath-taking.

But, after all, this is part of the day's work, or of the night's work, every time a night watch is

kept in the winter; once more will not make any great difference; and who would forego this annual privilege for the sake of frowsting below and keeping out of the cold?

I do not know how many centuries old this naval custom may be, but it is undoubtedly of very ancient date. There is a certain passage in the works of the Writing-Master that bears closely upon this subject. It occurs at the beginning of one of the chapters in *Dombey and Son*—I think the thirteenth, but am not able to say for certain; as I deeply regret that there is not a single copy of the book on board, all except three of Dickens's works having been forcibly deported from their rightful home in the Ship's Library—and yet we have the effrontery to talk about Prussianism!

However, the general tenor of the passage referred to is that: It is an ingenious speculation of certain modern philosophers that no sound is ever completely lost or dies away into entire stillness; but the waves of sound, once set in motion, continue until the end of time, reverberating in concert with every fresh sound and echoing around the world without cessation.

If there be any truth in such a theory, and if our mortal ears could be attuned to catch these finer waves, what a ringing o' bells should we hear when our youngest midshipman seizes the clapper at midnight on the thirty-first! With our Sixteen Bells there would chime in those of the old *Victory*, sounded by some little middy of

Nelson's who long ago became an Admiral himself and left an honoured record already becoming hard to decipher upon his crumbling monument; Drake's bell, ringing out sixteen merry notes just before he proceeded to take San Domingo, would join in; soft from the heated airs rising from the Hooghly would come the bells of Watson, whose ships helped to take Calcutta at the New Year; and, louder by another fifty years of recentness, those of the ships that captured Curaçoa; and louder still—so loud that in some living ears their sound has not yet died—the unconscious knell of the gallant *Formidable* that only two years ago plunged to her grave in the Channel, barely a couple of hours after her hopeful Sixteen Bells had heralded the New Year's morning.

What a ghostly carillon it would all make! But the sad notes and the glad notes together would all form parts of the same splendid theme: that query propounded in song by Newbolt, *Do the battleships' bells ring clear enough To be heard down below?* would be answered by a hearty chorus from the ships' companies of rotting galleons and sunken ironclads, and the voices of long-forgotten ringers would blend with the voices of long-silent bells in that pæan which the British Navy raises continually, and exists only to raise; the same pæan as the Angels sang of old, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill!

There is another Ring of Bells—naval bells—

which I trust will be sounded in the New Year. A few days ago a signalman came into our ante-room where several officers were sitting, and put a chit into Navvy's hand.

"What's that, Navvy?" we asked; "Press News? Read it out if it is!"

Very obligingly he did read out: "The German Chancellor announced in the Reichstag that Germany with her Allies, conscious—(and so on)—have proposed this morning to hostile Powers to enter into Peace Negotiations."

Well, one officer said, "Nothin' doin'"; and another remarked "Rats"; and the rest, who had paused for a moment to listen, immediately resumed their previous occupations and conversations. Which, I take it, is quite typical of the attitude taken by Great Britain and her Allies towards such idle talk; we shall proceed with what we have taken in hand, and when Sixteen Bells have brought in a New Year we shall get to work with the Germans, and "*Knock seven bells out of them!*"

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## XV. Wardroom Dialogues

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### 1. Seven-Bell Tea

A NUMBER of officers are seated at the wardroom table, all wanting to be served at once by a Royal Marine who has hardly had his beauty-sleep, with the assistance of the Maltese third steward, who would much rather continue his study of *La Vie*.

*Various Officers*: Outside! Outside! Pantry! I want some tea at once! It's gone seven bells; why isn't the tea down? Waiter!

*The Royal Marine* (outside, and fortunately not overheard): Gott strafe their little 'earts! 'Ere's all the wardroom officers 'owling like a pack of 'ungry wolves, an' nobody but me an' gallant little Malta to look after 'em! 'Ere, Joozepp, 'urry up and get the 'ot water from the galley!

*The Paymaster*: Well, I suppose I must start on cake if there isn't any tea. Pass along the Achi Baba, Guns, when you've finished digging trenches in it, will you?

*Guns* (politely passing the cake): Achi Baba, forsooth! I only wish I were anywhere near there! I might have a chance of popping off a



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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gun then, instead of being lost in the mists of the North Sea looking for what isn't there !

*The Young Doctor :* Well, what more d'you want? You can play about in your turrets all day long, can't you? It's myself that has the real grounds of complaint—hoping to get some interesting amputations or good compound fractures, and all I've had for the last week has been a second-class stoker with a whitlow on his thumb ! Ah ! here's the tea at last !

*Guns :* Bloodthirsty little ruffian ! You don't want tea ; what you want is a bowl of gore !

*The Young Doctor :* Another word from you, and I'll put the wine books on the table !

*The Navigator :* You people don't know when you're well off. Don't you realise that it's the navigating branch that is bearing all the brunt of this war? Where are you when I'm facing the storm on the bridge at midnight, guarding your safety? Why, tucked up in your flea-bags, with your nasty little heads on your stuffy little pillows !

*A Watchkeeper :* Yes, and reckoning up how much you can do the Admiralty in for pilotage ! I wish I was a navigator and living a gentleman's life. It's the watchkeeper has the real joy. Look at me—got the middle to-night, and coal-ship at daybreak, and lucky if I don't get a day on to top up with !

*The P.M.O. :* And very good for you, too. Help to take down a little of your war fat. If you

don't stop eating that cake you'll burst your Gieve's waistcoat in a minute. What your dear kind parents will say when they see you is more than I can tell.

*A Watchkeeper* : Yes, *when* they see me. Precious little chance of that for a long time to come. I'm beginning to feel like the young recruit on his way out to India—d'you know the yarn? He was leaning over the rail at the stern of the transport, feeling thoroughly homesick and wretched, and wondering whether to chuck himself into the ditch or not, when up comes the sergeant-major and claps him on the shoulder and says, "I know what you're thinking of. You're thinking of 'ome, you are. *You'll* never see 'ome no more!" Cheering, wasn't it?

*The Major of Marines* : Well, I could do with a week-end myself. What I say is, let's have the battle and get it over, and then we can all go on leave.

*An R.N.R. Assistant-Paymaster* (lately joined and quite serious-minded) : Do you think the German fleet will come out or not?

*Our Youngest Lieutenant* : Oh! for eving's sake don't let's have that old wheeze! If you want to raise a gag, try something a little more interesting. Who'll play deck-hockey after Quarters?

*The Young Doctor* : Roller-skating or flat-foot?

*Our Youngest Lieutenant* : Oh! rollers. Dead-off, flat-foot hockey; it's much too tame. Here, waiter, is this fresh milk or condensed?

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*The Royal Marine*: Condensed, sir. (Aside): An' we eight days at sea! Does 'ee think I keep a pet cow in me ditty-box?

*The Chief* (being somewhat slow of cerebation, he is usually about four remarks astern in a conversation): Well, *I* think they *will* come out. And I'll tell you why. Look here: suppose this bread-tray represents Wilhelmshaven, the edge of the table being the English coast, and the flower-vase Heligoland. My plate is the British Fleet. Well, suppose our Fleet is steaming up here—(he indicates the direction by a sweep of his left arm, incidentally knocking a cup and saucer down on the deck)—and their fleet goes in this direction—(here his right arm comes into play)——

*His Right-hand Neighbour*: Excuse me, chief, but your hand is resting upon my bread and jam. Of course, if you find it essential to your tactical demonstration, I don't mind; but——

*The Chief*: Oh! I'm sorry; I'm very sorry! (Thoughtfully sucks his fingers and subsides.)

*The P.M.O.*: This tea isn't fit to drink. Can't we get something a little better than this? Who's on the Mess Committee?

*A Lieutenant*: Why, you are yourself! I know, because I voted for you. I consider it is entirely due to my vote and interest that you now occupy your proud position, and if you would care to signify your gratitude in a substantial—that is to say, a liquid—manner, why——

*The P.M.O.*: If it's liquid you want, you can

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## Grand Fleet Days

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have my share of this slop-wash; it'll probably poison you.

*The Lieutenant*: I don't believe you really love me, saying such crool things.

*The R.N.R. Assistant-Paymaster* (addressing himself into the void): When do you think the war will end?

*The Major* (groaning heavily): He's at it again! Can't anybody stop him?

*The Chief* (taking fresh encouragement and a long breath): Well, I have my own theory about that. I reckon that the Germans are getting killed off at the rate of 200,000 a month, and have now about four million men left; that gives them exactly one year and eight months. But, of course, now Bulgaria's in it, and if Roumania and Greece also come in, to say nothing of America, which is probably doing us more good by supplying us with ammunition, of which ourselves and our Allies will now be getting an ever-increasing amount, whereas Germany cannot keep up her supply at the present rate for very long, principally because, although she may have an unlimited quantity of iron and copper—for, of course, her yarn about being short of those was only a bluff to try and deceive us—yet there are other materials quite essential to the manufacture of explosives which she cannot produce herself, and must get from other countries, and pay for in hard cash, and that can't go on for ever, because her gold reserve—

*The Young Doctor*: Would you mind saying it

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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all over again, chief? I'm afraid I don't quite follow you?

(At this moment the call for quarters is sounded off, and those officers who have not already finished their tea arise from the table and hunt for their caps, leaving the Young Doctor to be buttonholed by the Chief, who has taken his request seriously, which serves him right !)

*The Royal Marine* (from the pantry): Well, that's over! 'Ere, Joozepp, see if there's a drop left in the teapot.

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## 2. *Writing a Letter*

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**S**CENE, the wardroom; and the time being about 2.30 p.m., every settee and armchair is occupied by an officer wrapped in gentle slumber. Stillness reigns, except for a noise below, like a dockyard in full swing (chipping boiler tubes), and a noise above like all the porters of all the railway stations combined in one huge luggage-juggling stunt (provisioning ship). Enter Lieutenant Smith-Jones, with writing materials in his hand. He sits down at the long table.

*Lieut. S.-J.*: At last I can snatch a few moments to write a letter, though I'm hanged if I know what to say, these days. Mustn't say the weather is cold—it gives away the fact that the ship is not cruising in the tropics. Well, here goes! (Writes): "My dearest Bessiekins"—no, dash it all, I can't let the censor see that; must pitch it a little milder—"My dearest Bessie"—still too strong; I should get ragged about it for a month! (Tears up the page, and several others to follow, and finally settles down gloomily with "Dear Elizabeth.")

Well, I'm away now; the thing is now to get on with the washing. Let's see, what can I say

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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next? Poor little girl; she won't like this letter a bit. That was a ripping day I spent with her down at Guzzle last week! Well, that'll do for a start. (Writes): "I shall never forget the day—the day——" (Enter a signalman.)

*Signalman*: Are you the officer of the day, sir?

*Lieut. S.-J.* (still dreaming): The day? Yes, of course; the day she promised to—eh? What's that? Who are you? What d'ye want? No, I'm not officer of the day. Get to blazes out of it!

*Signalman*: Aye, aye, sir. (Salutes and departs, and, having closed the wardroom door softly behind him, falls upon the neck of the sentry outside, exclaiming, amidst happy laughter: "Oh! thish yer Love's Young Dream! Wot a game it is, bow-wow!")

*Lieut. S.-J.* (continuing to write and reciting the words half-aloud): "I shall never forget the day——"

*The Assistant-Paymaster* (from a settee where he has been awake for the last couple of minutes): Well, you've said that twice now. What day is it you're gassing about?

*Lieut. S.-J.* (confused, and trying to put the other off the scent): Why, Der Tag, of course! I was thinking about the chances of a fleet action.

*The A.-P.*: How can you say you will never forget the day, you silly ass, when the day hasn't come off?

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Lieut. S.-J.*: Well, I shan't forget it, if it does come off; that's what I mean.

*The A.-P.*: You may, for all you can tell. You might lose your memory from shell-shock, or you might very likely get killed. And if you survived and lived to an extreme old age, you would be almost bound to get a bit shaky about the details. So how can you say you will never forget it?

*Lieut. S.-J.*: Look here, who's writing this letter—you or me? Dry up, and go to sleep again.

*The A.-P.*: All right; don't get huffy about it. I only wanted to help you. (Relapses into slumber.)

*Lieut. S.-J.*: Thank goodness, he's gone to sleep again. Now I can get along, perhaps, without any more interruptions. "Dear little Bessie." (He ruminates rhapsodically, gazing into space for some five minutes.) I say, this won't do. I'm not getting on with it at all. (Writes.) "I shall never forget the day when you promised to be mine for ever."

*The A.-P.* (waking up again): I bet you it'll all be over in six months!

*Lieut. S.-J.* (indignantly): I'm jolly certain it won't. It'll go on as long as I live!

*The A.-P.*: What, the war go on as long as you live? Well, all I can say is, I hope you won't live very long in that case!

*Lieut. S.-J.*: Oh! the war?



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*The A.-P.* : Yes, of course, the war. What did you think I was talking about?

*Lieut. S.-J.* : Oh ! I meant the war, too. Yes, my opinion is that it will last for many, many years !

*The A.-P.* : Why, I heard you bet the Chief a gin last night that peace would be signed next Easter twelvemonths.

*Lieut. S.-J.* : Well, a fellow can change his opinions, I suppose, can't he ? I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting me. I'm writing a very important letter—a business letter.

*The A.-P.* : Well, I'll go and see if the mail has come. (Exit.)

*Lieut. S.-J.* (writes) : “ I shall very probably be having a few days' leave next month, and I propose we get married then. We needn't have any fuss, and you don't want to bother about getting any new clothes. Only next month ! ”

(Enter the Third Writer, who demands) : Please, sir, do you wish to remit this month ?

*Lieut. S.-J.* : This month ? No ; next month, I said.

*Third Writer* : Beg pardon, sir ?

*Lieut. S.-J.* : Oh ! it's you, is it ? What is it you want ? Don't come bothering me now ; I'm busy.

*Third Writer* : Very good, sir. (Exit.)

*Lieut. S.-J.* : Dash it ! I shall never get this letter finished.

(Re-enter the A.-P., who throws a letter with unerring aim) : One for you, Smith-Jones.

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*Grand Fleet Days*

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*Lieut. S.-J.* (recognising "Dear Elizabeth's" handwriting): Ha! (This is pronounced with involuntary ecstasy.)

*The A.-P.:* H'm! Another business letter, I suppose!

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### 3. *The Messman*

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**SCENE:** In harbour. **Time:** The very early part of the month, being the only time when anybody has any money. In this dialogue the officers who take the various parts are simply denoted by letters of the alphabet, as it doesn't matter a blow who they are. Carry on, please.

*A.:* Messenger, go and ask the messman if he will be good enough to come and speak to me.

*The Messenger:* Aye, aye, sir. (Exit.)

*B.:* That reminds me, I want to speak to the messman, too.

*C.:* So do I.

*D.:* Me, too.

*E.:* Well, you might as well try and speak grammatically, even if you do. "Me, too!" You should say "I also," or——

*D.:* Are you asking for a thick ear? (He proceeds to turn the card-table over on top of E., who gleefully takes up the challenge, and prepares for a very pleasant little scrap, which, to the regret of both D. and E., is cut short by the arrival of

#### THE MESSMAN.

(This functionary is an important personage, and so deserves a line all to himself. They call

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## Grand Fleet Days

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him "Maître d'Hôtel" in the French Navy; he gets called all sorts of things in ours. He is tastefully garbed in civilian clothes, much better ones than you can afford, and owns a row of houses out at Peverell—opposite the row belonging to the Master-at-Arms. His face has the impassive impenetrability—or the impenetrable impassiveness, if you prefer it that way—of a Chinese lawyer. For the rest, there is nothing he doesn't know, and nothing he won't do to oblige you.)

A.: Oh, I say, messman, are you going ashore to-morrow morning?

*The Messman*: Yessir.

A.: Well, I want you to get a few things for me.

*The Messman*: Yessir.

A.: I want a bath-sponge and a bee-clock, and a packet of razor-blades, two boxes of cigars—same as you got for me before—half-a-dozen dry batteries to fit my pocket electric torch, a half-cake of chromium green—Winsor and Newton's, mind; not the other sort. Oh, and while you're about it you might see if you can get me a flat sable brush, size 00, at the same place. And I want you to take back my library-book—you'll find it on the writing-table in my cabin, or else on the bookshelf. It's a red-covered book called *The History of Polly Hopkins*, or *Matilda Snooks*, or some silly name like that; and try and get one of Compton Mackenzie's, or, if they're all out, then any book of Victoria Cross's, but not one

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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that I've had already. Let me see, is there anything else? Oh, yes, a roll of films and a bottle of tabloid quinol developer; and you might call in at the Stores and see if they've got my camera back yet. Got all that?

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*B.* : Oh, and I say, messman, look here. You know that what's-its-name of mine—at least, it isn't mine, it belongs to old Thingummy—well, I want you to take it round to that place—you know where I mean—and get it—er—er—that is, have a what-d'ye-call-it put on it. Tell 'em it's no use putting a gadget on like they did before, because that won't stand the—er—what-name. But you can tell 'em all about the silly thing. You know exactly what's wanted, don't you?

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*B.* : And if they can't do it, take it to that other place, down by—you know—just round the corner from that shop. I forget what the name is, but it's a what's-its-name shop, just about three or four doors down, or it may be at the end of the street. But don't leave it there without finding out first if they keep those silly things that you put on to a what-d'ye-call; though, of course, a thing-ma-jig might do, and you'd better get that if you can't get the other thing.

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*C.* : There's something I want you to do for me, messman, if you will. I left my motor-cycle out at Stoke yesterday—got a bad puncture.

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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You'll probably be passing somewhere near there, so will you see about getting it back for me? I must have it by to-morrow afternoon, so you'll make sure of getting it, won't you?

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*D.* : And will you call in at that flower shop in Fore Street and get those palms I ordered? And I should like you to take them yourself, so as to make certain they don't get knocked about. I'll give you the address; it isn't very far to go.

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*A.* : Wait a minute, messman; I meant to tell you before, but I forgot. I've got a party of people coming off to lunch to-morrow. Can't tell you exactly how many there will be; I've asked fifteen, but possibly only about four will be able to turn up. Anyhow, I want you to put on a nice little lunch for them.

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*A.* : Get just what you like, so long as it's something that they'll all eat; but there must be strawberries. Hang it all, strawberries are out of season now, aren't they?

*The Messman* : Yessir.

*A.* : Oh, well, you must try and get some anyway. And see that the hot dishes are really hot and properly cooked. That cook of ours has a habit of doing things to a chip, or else serving them half raw. We shall lunch at one o'clock, or, if the train is late, we may not be able to sit down

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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much before half-past two. That'll be all right, won't it?

*The Messman* : Yessir.

(And he departs, impassively imperturbable. All the commissions will be executed to the entire satisfaction of A., B., C., and D.)

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#### 4. *The Mess Papers*

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**A**DREARY time in the "dog-watches." Three officers, who have failed to find a fourth to get a game of bridge, have resigned themselves mournfully to turning over the pages of picture-papers nearly a week old. Other officers are gleaning from equally obsolete dailies the knowledge that there is no change on the Western or any other front.

*Lieut. Jones* (throwing down an illustrated weekly with a gesture that may be described as "petulant"): I'm fed up with these picture-papers—they're all exactly alike! I'm sure I've seen this portrait of Lady MacKeckieye and Tripehound a dozen times! And who wants to see her, anyway? Pass me the *Sketch* or the *Mirror*, somebody.

*Lieut. Brown*: The *Sketch*? I saw it the day I arrived, but have never caught sight of it since. Some one has taken it to read in his cabin, I expect. It oughtn't to be allowed. I'm all against mess papers being taken to officers' cabins.

*Lieut. Robinson*: More likely it's disappeared on the mess-deck. That's where most of our papers go, I'm convinced.



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## Wardroom Dialogues

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*Lieut. Smith* : What's that paper you're sitting on, Brown? Isn't that the *Sketch*?

*Lieut. Brown* : H'm, so it is. Now I wonder who put that there?

*Lieut. Jones* : Well, anyhow, I think we ought to get some more papers. We don't get half enough light literature. What's the good of all those stodgy quarterlies, etc., we take in? Nobody wants to read those in a time like this; we want something to amuse us.

*The Staff-Surgeon* : Well, I like that kind, and only wish we had more of them. I propose we do away with some of the papers and take a few quarterly reviews instead.

*Lieuts. Brown, Jones, Smith, and Robinson* : No, no; dead off!

*The Senior Eng.-Lieut.* : I agree with you, doctor. What these fellows want is *Comic Cuts* and *Snappy Bits*. We've got quite enough light literature in the mess already; what we want is something more of the serious kind.

*Lieut. Jones* : Quite right. I want *The Motor-Bicycle* taken in.

*Lieut. Brown* : Yes; and the *Amateur Photographer* for me.

*Lieut. Smith* (who doesn't care tuppence about the question, but scents a mirthful rag, which, by the way, is the attitude really of all the others, though you wouldn't think so to listen to them) : And I should like the mess to take in *The Poultry World*, *The War Cry*, *The Tailor and Cutter*, and

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Little Folks.* All those papers appeal to me. I've got an aunt who keeps fowls; our cook at home belongs to the Salvation Army; I owe for two suits of plain clothes; and I just dote on little children, bless their hearts!

*The Staff-Surgeon:* Oh, dry up! Seriously, there is no reason why we shouldn't get a few more papers; then everybody could have what he likes to read, and nobody would have a growl. Take the *Western Independent*, for instance. It is always in demand, and a few more copies would prevent friction.

(*General Chorus:* Hear, hear.)

*The Chaplain:* Wouldn't it be as well to see how the paper fund stands? What do we pay now?

*The Fleet-Paymaster:* Four shillings a month, each member.

*The Young Surgeon:* Four shillings! Why, in my last ship we only paid half-a-crown. I propose we reduce the subscription.

*The Eng.-Lieut.* (quite irrelevantly, but he hasn't been listening): Why don't we take in *Land and Water*? There are awfully good articles about the war in it. Will anybody support me in the proposal to take in *Land and Water*?

*The Marine Subaltern* (out for blood): Why should I pay any paper subscription at all? I don't want to read the papers. It's only subscription in another form, and I for one object to it. I'm not going to pay the subscription any more.

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*Lieut. Smith:* Oh! all right. Only I'll take jolly good care you don't ever look at a mess paper.

*The Fleet-Paymaster:* Of course, no one is obliged to pay if he wishes not to.

*Several Officers:* Let him stand out if he wants to. We'll divide up his share between us.

*The Fleet-Paymaster* (making a rapid calculation): In that case the others will have to pay four - and - threepence - halfpenny each. Do you really wish to stop your paper subscription, young soldier.

*The Marine Subaltern:* Certainly not, Pay! Wouldn't dream of doing such a thing! I only wanted to raise a bit of a rag—this discussion seemed to be getting a bit too dull.

*The Fleet-Paymaster:* Well, has anyone got any real suggestions to make now we're on the subject? I'm writing to the newsagent people this week, so if there's any revision to be made, now is the time to make it, before we start the next quarter.

*Lieut. Smith:* Yes, let's do away with the *Daily Wail*.

*Lieut. Jones:* Yes, let's have a bonfire now. I don't suppose it'll burn the corticene. Go and get a bundle of old *Wails*, somebody.

*The Fleet-Paymaster:* Naked lights and wax matches are not allowed on board ship. Has anybody else got any suggestion to make?

(Dead silence intervenes.)

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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*The Fleet-Paymaster* : Then I suppose we just go on as we are? I'll send in the same list of papers for next quarter. Does every one agree to that?

*The Marine Subaltern* : Carried *nem. con.*

*The Commander* (entering the mess): I say, what about having a mess meeting on the subject of the papers? Isn't it time we made a few changes?

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### 5. *The Gramophone*

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TEN o'clock, on a wet evening. Most of the officers are sitting in stony silence, and the rain is leaking through the skylight. Even the wine steward feels that the Russian Kromesgies and Scotch woodcock at dinner have not been a success, and the general gloom is reflected in his face.

*Lieut. Merry* (who wishes to ginger things up a little): What ho! Avast there, my hearties! Can't nobody do nothing to promote a little *joie-de-vivre*? Cheerily, my lads, yeo ho! Don't let the glorious traditions of the fine old crusted British Navy get forgotten! What shall we do just to put a little life into it?

*Surgeon Mouldie*: Oh, dry up, Merry, and don't try and be funny. What do you want to come disturbing everybody for?

(Several other officers grunt their approval of these remarks.)

*Paymaster Bright* (who has not succumbed to the general depression): I'm with you, Merry. We must really do something to brighten life. Why, anyone would think it was peace time, a dull evening like this! What shall we do?

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Lieut. Merry*: What about a tune on the gramophone just to rouse the lads?

*Paymaster Bright*: Right-o! Set her going, full speed ahead, both engines, and let harmony prevail.

*Lieut. Merry*: What shall we have? Here's "Land of Hope and Glory" and "Never let your Braces Dangle." I say, what a pity there isn't some arrangement by which we could switch on the two together! They would sound pretty, wouldn't they?

*Paymaster Bright*: Well, ladies first. Let Clara do her bit, and stand by to join in the chorus.

*A Voice* (from the depths of an armchair): There isn't any chorus to that; it's a contralto solo.

*Paymaster Bright*: Oh, isn't there? Then we'll jolly soon make one. Come on, Merry, let her rip!

*The Gramophone*: G—r—r, g—r—r, g—r—r, g—r—r—r!

*Another Voice* (getting more wakeful): Why, you've got the darn thing on wrong side up!

*Lieut. Merry*: So it is. All right; now we'll start again, and look out for the chorus.

*The Gramophone*: "Land of——"

*Several gradually roused officers*: "Ho-ope and Glo-ory, land of"—what's the words? I don't know how the blessed thing goes. Never mind; it doesn't matter what you sing; keep the tune up, that's the main thing. "Make thee mi-ightier

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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still." In at the death, anyhow. Who says the English aren't a musical nation?

*Surgeon Mouldie*: I can't stand this! I came in here to be quiet, not to listen to this infernal racket. (Stalks moodily out of the room.)

*Lieut. Merry*: The next item on the programme will be—well, I don't know; what shall we have?

*Paymaster Bright*: Oh, any old thing! Take the first one that comes out of the box.

*Lieut. Merry*: "Elephant Jam," by Caruso.

*Another Officer*: "Elephant Jam"? What on earth's that? Never heard of it.

*Paymaster Bright*: Oh, don't you know it? It's out of *Rigoletto*. But, I say, wouldn't it be more fun to turn him into a soprano?

*Several*: Yes, by Jove, yes! But how do you do it?

*Paymaster Bright*: Nothing simpler. You just push over the time-gadget to top speed—like this. (Does so. The result is distinctly funny, though probably Signor Caruso would not think so.)

*Lieut. Merry*: Now we'll have another. What shall it be this time?

*An Officer*: Let's have one of Harry Lauder's.

*Another*: No; put on something from *To-night's the Night*.

*Another*: What about Florrie Forde? Haven't we got any of hers?

*Another*: I'd like to hear "Hello, Tu-Tu."

*Another*: No; give us a bit of the *Yeomen of the Guard*.

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Lieut. Merry* : Now, my little dears, no crowding, please. One down, t'other come on. Suppose we take them in turn? The next selection will be a song by Mr. Harry Lauder, entitled, "Roaming in the Gloaming," and gentlemen are requested to join in with all that sympathy of tone and depth of feeling which the song demands. Hold on a second. Waiter, bring me a half-whisky. Now, then, all ready? One, two, three—let her go!

(They let her go. After a while the gramophone stops, but that is not noticed amongst the many voices uplifted in loud and prolonged repetition of the tuneful number. The chorus gets louder and louder.)

Enter a sentry.

*Lieut. Merry* : What is it, sentry?

*Sentry* : From the captain, sir. Will you please stop that d——d noise? (Exit.)



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## 6. *The Showman*

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THE scene changes frequently to various parts of the ship. The *dramatis personæ* are: (1) girl, bewitchingly pretty and young; (2) principal boy, who is also the hero and the villain of the piece. He is really Staff-Paymaster Dibbs, affectionately known as Toodleums. Then there is (3) the First Lieutenant, who doesn't really count, as he only just flicks on at the beginning and at the end.

*The First Lieutenant* (who has apparently just broken away from a ship tea-party, accompanied by girl): Oh, I say, what a nuisance! I'll have to leave you for a while; the skipper has sent for me. What am I to do? I can't leave you alone to be the prey of our savage crew. Oh, by Jove! here's the very man! Do you know old Dibbs? Rattling good chap. I'll get him to look after you for a while, if you don't mind. Dibbs! Say! I say, may I introduce you? Mr. Dibbs—Miss H'm-ha-h'm. Sorry I must leave you, but, Dibbs, Miss Er—er would like awfully to have a look round the ship, and—well, I mustn't keep the old man waiting; you'll be quite all right, you two, won't you? (Exit.)

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Dibbs* : Would you really like to look round the ship? Are you sure you wouldn't rather come and sit down somewhere? (*To himself*: I wish she would. I've never been round the ship myself. Don't know a single blessed thing about it!)

*Girl* : Oh, I should love to see it all. You must tell me about everything. Ships are so interesting, aren't they?

*Dibbs* : Oh, frightfully. What shall we start with? This (indicating the surrounding country with a sweep of his arm) is called the quarter-deck.

*Girl* : Oh, really! Why?

*Dibbs* : Oh, er—(I'm sure I don't know. Why is it, I wonder?) Oh, because it gets scrubbed out every three months—on Quarter Day. These are our guns—at least, two of 'em.

*Girl* : Oh, really! And how many are there on the boat altogether?

*Dibbs* : About twenty couple and a half, I believe. But they're constantly changing. It depends largely on the First Lieutenant. The last man we had was a bit of a crank on the subject—what they call a gunnery lieutenant. He would insist upon having more guns and yet more guns. We had as many as eighty at one time, and it was quite difficult to get about the upper deck for them, especially after dark. But it's better now.

*Girl* : And which end do you put the bullet in?

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*Dibbs* : Why, the end, you see, where the round hole is. That's why the guns are kept pointed upwards, so that the bullets shan't drop out.

*Girl* : I see. Then I suppose they lower the points of the cannons down towards the deck to load them? It must be very difficult, isn't it?

*Dibbs* : Oh, no; that's not the way they do it at all. You see the masts, don't you? Well, they're hollow, and the bullets come up inside them, shot up by an arrangement like you see in a shop when you get your change in a little box; then they pass along those cross-sticks on the mast, and are lowered down by those ropes, you see, and dropped into the cannon's mouth. It's quite simple, really. Let's come along the upper deck, shall we?

*Girl* : Oh, here's another little gun; isn't it a darling! Isn't it just too twee for words!

*Dibbs* : That's called a three-pounder. It isn't a gun, really—not for killing enemies with, I mean; it's only a practice gun, and makes a sort of shrill, barking noise. The idea is to fire it constantly so as to get the men used to the voice of the commander, which it much resembles. But if any man fires it off without orders, he gets fined £3. Hence the name. Now here is the fore-bridge. Shall we go up? You don't mind climbing ladders, do you?

*Girl* : Why is it called a bridge? It doesn't look much like one.

*Dibbs* : Ah! that's a very shocking and painful

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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story. I almost wish you hadn't touched on it. But, since you have, I'll tell you. The fact is, some of our officers are inveterate card-players. They will gamble, though, of course, it isn't allowed; so in order to get away from the sight of the men they had this little sort of scaffolding-place built, and they come up here and play auction. It is winked at by the authorities, I'm afraid, and almost every ship has a place like this. It's called the bridge-room, or the bridge, for short.

*Girl*: But there seem to be sailors here now, and there are no officers gambling?

*Dibbs*: Ah! but you should see it of a night-time! During the day the place is used for signalling.

*Girl*: Oh! is he signalling—that man waving those flags? What is he saying? Can you tell me?

*Dibbs*: Oh, certainly. "C-A-P — Captain to Admiral." (Hold on a minute.) "Meet me at Sawdust Club to-night if sober."

*Girl*: How clever you are! Fancy being able to read like that!

*Dibbs*: Oh, that's nothing, really. Sight-signalling is awfully easy. It's the scent-signalling that is the difficult matter.

*Girl*: Scent-signalling! Why, what is that?

*Dibbs*: I don't know that I ought to tell you—it's highly confidential and secret. But we have a system of sending different perfumes along an

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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electric current, one after another, in a sort of code. There are only three scents used—peppermint, violet, and carbolic. Suppose, for instance, we send a scent-message to, we'll say, the flagship in China, in that particular order, that means: "Sell at once; market dropping heavily."

*Girl*: I noticed a distinct smell of violets in town this morning.

*Dibbs*: Ah! that by itself, without the carbolic or peppermint in conjunction, was probably a message from the Flag-Lieutenant to the Admiral's daughter—a private message gone astray. It meant, "Yes, I will be round as soon as I can."

*Girl*: Oh!

*Dibbs*: Would you care to see my cabin? Down this way. Small, isn't it?

*Girl*: It is small, but it's very pretty. I suppose every one of the sailors has a cabin like this?

*Dibbs*: Yes, the whole eight hundred of them. It makes it awfully hard work for the padre.

*Girl*: What does?

*Dibbs*: Why, going round to the whole eight hundred cabins every night and hearing the sailors say their prayers, and then tucking them in, saying good-night, and blowing out the candle for them.

*Girl*: And do you always live in this little cabin?

*Dibbs*: Well, the men live in theirs, but if the ship is travelling, the officers always go ashore and

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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take the train, and pick the ship up at the next port.

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(An Hour Later.)

*The First Lieutenant:* Well, how did you get along? She's an awfully nice girl, isn't she?

*Dibbs:* Very. But who is she? I didn't catch her name.

*The First Lieutenant:* Why, the Admiral's daughter? Didn't you know?

*Dibbs:* Help!

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## 7. Solving an Acrostic

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THE Fleet-Surgeon is discovered sitting at the wardroom table, with an open newspaper in front of him. His eye, like the proverbial poet's, "is in a fine frenzy rolling," and he appears generally to be suffering from brain-storm. The track of this said storm is marked by scattered sheets of paper, on which strange words have been written, and then scratched out again. Suddenly he looks up and demands in a worried voice—

What begins with "L" and ends with "R"—the name of a profession?

*The Paymaster*: "Liar."

*F.-S.*: Don't be a wag. "Liar" isn't the name of a profession, is it?

*The Pay.*: Well, I don't know; some people are too good at it to be classed as amateurs. But why? What are you doing?

*F.-S.*: I'm solving this acrostic—or trying to.

*Pay.*: What frivolous people you doctors are! Your life must be one gay whirl of excitement!

*F.-S.*: Dry up, unless you like to bring the weight of your knowledge to bear upon this. If so, think again, and tell me the name of a

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## Grand Fleet Days

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profession beginning with "L" and ending with "R."

*Pay.*: Let me see—leather-mender, launderer, lamplighter, lobelia-grower?

*F.-S.*: Don't be silly. Those aren't professions.

*Pay.*: What about lingerer?

*F.-S.*: What on earth's a lingerer? Never heard of it.

*Pay.*: One who linges, from the verb "to linge," derived from the French "lingerie." Like haberdasher from "haberdashery." Lingerer, a man who designs, makes, or sells linen clothing.

*F.-S.*: I believe you're making it all up. Stop rotting, and give me a proper word if you can.

*Pay.*: I must know something more about it first. How far have you got?

*F.-S.*: Only as far as the "uprights"—Belgium and Berlin.

*Pay.*: You're quite sure about that?

*F.-S.*: Yes, I think so. Listen!

"My first, a country overrun  
By blood-stained boot of ruthless Hun;  
But strict account will sure be reckoned  
When the avengers get to second."

*Pay.*: And you make that——?

*F.-S.*: "Belgium" and "Berlin," of course!  
What else can they be?

*Pay.*: But "Belgium" has got seven letters, and "Berlin" only six.

*F.-S.*: Confound it all, so they have! And I



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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had got two splendid "lights" for B—B and E—E. Now I shall have to start all over again.

*Pay.*: How about "Serbia" for the first up-right? That would fit in, wouldn't it?

*F.-S.*: So it would. Yes, of course, that's it. Now for the first "light."

*Pay.*: Let's finish the one you were doing—the profession beginning with "L" and ending with "R."

*F.-S.*: But there isn't any "L" now; it's "R—R."

*Pay.*: Of course it is. No wonder we found it difficult. Let's see—writer? No, that starts with "w." Better take all the vowels in order—rambler redintegrator, rinser, roysterer, rum-distiller. No good, eh?

*F.-S.*: It's funny how hard these things can be, and yet it looks easy enough:—

"An honoured profession, by which, it is said,  
A man can most easily earn daily bread."

*Pay.*: Well, it can't be "Paymaster," that's a dead cert.! Look how we have to dig out to earn our miserable pittance! I'll tell you what—let's ask someone else.

(Enter several officers.)

*Pay.*: I say, what profession begins and ends with "R."

*The Captain of Marines*: Oh, that's easy enough! With "R," did you say? Why—well, I'm blest if I know of one! Hang it, I can't be done by a thing like that! I'll tell you presently. (Exit.)

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*The Chaplain* : I've got an acrostic dictionary in my cabin ; I'll go and look it up. (Exit.)

*The Senior Watch-keeper* : I'm rather good at these things. Give me half a minute, and I'll tell you. With " R " ? Beginning with " R " ? Where's the dictionary ? (Exit.)

*The Engineer-Lieutenant* : I believe I have an old Trades Dictionary somewhere. That might give it. (Exit.)

*The Commander* : It sounds easy enough, doesn't it ? That's the worst of these things—there's generally some catch in them. Just give me a chit of paper ; I'll think it out during the day.

\* \* \* \* \*

(Six Hours Later.)

(On the Stokers' Mess-deck.)—*Stoker 2nd Class Alf. Wallsend* (to his chum) : I say, 'Igginson, wot profession is there wot begins with a " R " and ends with a " R " ?

(On the Signal-bridge, by wireless and in cypher.)—*Captain to Captain* : Shall be much obliged if you can kindly inform me of the name of a profession which begins and ends with the letter " R."

(And it isn't solved yet !)

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## 8. *The Perfect Pessimist*

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AS there is an individual of the type herein described in every branch of the Service, his name and rank need not be specified; he may be allowed to appear simply as the "Perfect Pessimist," or "P. P.," for short. And if you want to know what he really thinks, it will be necessary for you to read on patiently till you get to the end. The scene is in the wardroom, at any old time.

*P. P.* (speaking to all in general and apropos of nothing in particular): Well, all I can say is, I hope to goodness we don't have a fleet action.

*No. 1*: Hullo! what's biting you? Why do you hope that?

*P. P.*: Because I don't want to see our Navy blown out of the water—that's why! So far as I can see, it would take the German fleet just about half an hour to walk clean through us! Their ships are ever so much better than ours—better built, better designed, better gunned, better everything!

*Lieut. G.*: Do you really believe that?

*P. P.*: Believe it? I know it! I grant you

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## Grand Fleet Days

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we have more ships than they have, but, ship for ship, we aren't a match for them; can't hold a candle to 'em !

*Lieut. T. :* By Jove ! We're in a bad way !

*P. P. :* Oh, you may laugh, but you know it's true. Look at their officers—highly trained, scientific men, every one of 'em ; and their men—chockful of patriotism and zeal, properly taught, and properly handled !

*Lieut. R.M. :* Well, but come—we haven't done so badly so far, have we ?

*P. P. :* Just by sheer luck ! Well, luck may carry us through yet ; it's the only thing that will, anyhow. That's all I'm trusting to !

*No. 1 :* You seem to have a pretty poor opinion of the Navy, haven't you ? What makes you think like that ?

*P. P. :* Oh, well, I judge by this ship ! We can't steam, we can't shoot, we can't do anything ! And I've no reason to believe that other ships are different to this. If they're not, then Heaven help us, that's all I've got to say !

*Lieut. G. :* But we did pretty good firing last time, didn't we ? In fact, every time ! My modesty almost forbids me to remind you that we got a hot-air signal from the flagship, specially congratulating us on our shooting.

*P. P. :* Pooh ! Then all the other ships must have been pretty rotten ! I was on deck, and watched it myself. And darn bad shooting it was, too, in my opinion !

## Wardroom Dialogues

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*Eng.-Lieut.*: Well, what's the matter with our steaming? I can't recall any breakdowns. We seem to be able to keep going all right.

*P. P.*: All luck again! Wait till we get some really bad weather, then we shall see! Honestly, I think our best chance in an action would be to be sunk by one of our own torpedoes and put out of misery! That's about all our torpedoes would do—turn round and hit their own ship; as for running straight for a hundred yards, I'll eat my hat if they can do it!

*Sentry* (entering and saluting): Gentleman to see you, sir.

*P. P.*: Who—me? What sort of gentleman? Who is he? Where is he?

*Sentry*: Civilian, sir. I've shown him to your cabin.

*P. P.*: All right. I'll come right along. (Exit.)

(The rest of the dialogue is continued in the *P. P.*'s cabin, the *dramatis personæ* being, as the picture papers would say, *P. P.* and friend.)

*Friend*: Hullo, old bird! How's things? I had to come down this way on business, and thought I would just blow along and see you. It's the first time I've been on board a modern ship, and——

*P. P.*: Then you've come to the right place, me boy! If you like, I'll show you round, and you'll see the finest ship in the Navy!

*Friend*: Is that so? Thanks; I shall be delighted. Tell me—I say—you know all about it—

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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what is the Navy really like? What sort of a state is it in, I mean?

*P. P.:* The Navy? What sort of a state? My dear fellow, you should ask the Germans that question!

*Friend:* Well, they seem to have a wholesome respect for it, it's true. Do you think they mean to put up a fight?

*P. P.:* I only wish they would! But they've got more sense. Why, it wouldn't be a fight—we should plaster them out of existence in about ten minutes! Fight? It would be chicken-slaughter!

*Friend:* Your gunnery's pretty good, then?

*P. P.:* Gunnery? Well, I only wish you could have seen this ship last time we fired! Every single shot would have hit the enemy if he had been the target!

*Friend:* But they're pretty good, too, aren't they? I've heard they have some very good ships.

*P. P.:* So they may have; I don't say they haven't. But you can't have better than the best, and that's what ours are. And if any ships can touch ours for sound construction, good steaming qualities, or anything else you like to mention, why, I'd just like to see them, that's all!

*Friend:* But their men are awfully well trained, aren't they, and their officers, too?

*P. P.:* Well drilled, if you like. And, of course, they're terrific x-chasers. But I don't think there's much wrong with our lot. We go by the system

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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that suits us best. It's panned out very well in the past, and you can depend on it to do all that's required for the future. But come along and have a look round, and, as I said before, I'll show you something of the finest ship of the finest Navy in the world !

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## 9. *The Scapegoat*

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THIS is not, strictly speaking, a "Wardroom Dialogue," though part of it takes place in the wardroom. It is really an all-over-the-ship dialogue, and you must imagine yourself on a personally-conducted tour, starting in the captain's cabin, and finishing "somewhere on the upper-deck."

*The Captain* (with a face like a sea-boot): Commander, would you mind reading through this? It has just come from the Vice-Admiral.

*The Commander* (who, as he reads, rapidly acquires a face like a scrubbed hammock): H'm! What do you make of it, sir?

*Captain*: What do I make of it? The question is—what do *you* make of it? Or, rather, what *have* you made of it? And I'll tell you the answer to that straight off: You've made a mess of it—a pretty mess of it! To think that I should get a rub-down like this from the Admiral——

(And so on. Now we adjourn to the Commander's cabin.)

*Commander*: I should have thought, No. 1,



that you would have had more sense ! Hang it all, you're First Lieutenant of this ship, aren't you, and what's a First Lieutenant for ? I consider that you've let me down—let me down badly ! You might have told me—I can't be everywhere ; and how is a Commander to know what's going on unless people *do* let him know ? I can't leave the ship for half an hour without something going wrong !

*First Lieutenant :* Sorry, sir, but I'm afraid I don't yet quite understand what has gone wrong.

*Commander :* I should have thought it was plain enough. Why hasn't the copper-punt been hoisted out ? I wrote it down in my order-book ; and, besides, I distinctly remember asking you to see it done, before I left the ship !

(Now we really do get to the wardroom, if only to leave it again very shortly.)

*First Lieutenant :* Who is the Officer of the Day ?

*A Certain Officer :* I am. What is it, No. 1 ? Can I do anything ?

*First Lieutenant :* H'm ! You don't look as if you could. I always thought that at this hour the Officer of the Day was supposed to be on deck ! There's the side-party, supposed theoretically to be painting the ship, and, so far as I can see, their whole occupation appears to be having a little political discussion or something of that sort. Upon my word, I don't blame 'em, when

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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the Officer of the Day thinks fit to spend his time in the wardroom ! I can find plenty to do going round the mess-deck and flats, but it seems I can't be off the upper-deck for five minutes without something going wrong !

*Officer of the Day* : But there's no painting party at work now ; they sounded off cooks ten minutes ago !

*No. 1* : Did they ? A funny time of day to sound off cooks ! The routine of this ship beats everything I've ever heard of. I suppose they'll be sounding off sunset in a minute or two ! (Exit, still growling.)

*Officer of the Day* (proceeding on deck) : Who is the officer of the watch ? One of the Warrants, I suppose. Useless lot ! Where is he ? Officer of the Watch !

*O.O.W.* (who is standing about two paces off) : Sir ?

*O.O.D.* : Oh, there you are ! I've been singing out for you for the last five minutes ! Just cast your eye over that railing, will you ? What is the meaning of all those Irish pennants hanging over the side ? Upon my word, any one would think this was a "gobby" ship from her lousy appearance !

*O.O.W.* (removing a single rope's-end which has been hanging out of place) : Sorry, sir ; I didn't notice it.

*O.O.D.* : Well, if the Officer of the Watch can't

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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notice these things, I don't know who should ! I can't leave the deck two minutes without something going wrong ! (Leaves the deck—for an hour !)

*Officer of the Watch* : Quartermaster !

*Quartermaster* : Sir.

*O.O.W.* : Why isn't the picquet-boat called away ?

*Q.* : You never told me to call her away, sir.

*O.O.W.* : Told you ! Surely you don't want to be told every single blessed thing, do you ? Some of you people want to be dry-nursed, that's what it is ! The Quartermaster ought to know the ship's routine, and see it carried out ! That's your duty, and if you can't do your duty we shall very soon find some one else who can ! (Stalks away, with an air of honour avenged.)

*Quartermaster* : Side-boy ! Side-boy !

*Side-boy* : Yessir.

*Q.* : Don't say "Yessir," as if you wuz a blooming counter-jumper ! Lazy, good-fer-nothin' little monkey ! Why can't you speak when you're spoken to ?

*Side-boy* : Please, sir, you didn't ask me nothin'.

*Q.* : Hold yer tongue, and don't give me any of your back-answers. Take that fer yer impudence !

*Side-boy* : Yow !

*Q.* : Don't do it again, then ! (Exit.)

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*Grand Fleet Days*

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*Side-boy* (enticingly to the Ship's Cat): Poosy, poor little poosy; come here, then.

*Cat* (affectionately): Mrrrr?

*Side-boy*: That's for keeps! (Kicks cat.)

*Cat*: Mew!

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## 10. *Pay-Day*

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**T**IME—the last day of the month. Several officers in various stages of impecuniosity—ranging from complete stoney-brokenness to that state where one works out the problem of “How to have a day ashore for a bob”—are discussing the financial situation. There is only one real capitalist among the group, and he has borrowed five shillings from the messman.

*The Optimist*: Hooray! Here’s pay-day come at last! Now we shall all be rolling in wealth once more.

*The Pessimist*: What’s the good of it? By the time you’ve paid your mess-bill and worked off another little bit of your outfitter’s bill, there’s nothing left. It’s only taking it in with one hand to give it out with the other!

*The Humorist*: What’s the good of money? You only spend it when you’ve got it!

*The Capitalist* (jingling his borrowed five shillings ostentatiously): Well, I should be sorry to run out to a clinch in the way some of you fellows seem to do. For my part, I always take care to have money about me. A little management, a

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## Grand Fleet Days

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little calculation and forethought, that's all that is required.

*The Optimist*: What-ho! Here comes the Paymaster. Now for the Jimmy-o'-Goblins!

(Enter the Paymaster, laden with a number of small envelopes containing money.)

*The Specialist*: Pay and allowances! Well, I don't do so badly this month, anyhow.

*The Humorist*: If you were to do the graceful thing you would return two-thirds of it as conscience money. Tell you what, I'll cut you, my pay against yours?

*The Specialist*: Nothing doing. A grateful country values my services and assesses them, not up to their proper value, of course, but just sufficiently to show that my work is far more useful than your mere coolie labour.

*The Contortionist* (examining his money): I wonder if I've got my half-a-crown a day for physical training duties amongst this lot.

*The Economist* (who has been looking up the items in the extra-book): I say, Pay, there's something wrong about this. They've charged me twopence for an extra egg on the morning of the 14th. I never had an extra egg on the morning of the 14th.

*The Optimist*: By Jove! I'm one pound three and fourpence to the good this month! I've only got to pay my servant and my washing-bill out of it; haven't had so much for a long time.

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*The Humorist*: Well, don't go hoarding gold; put it into the War Loan.

*The Pragmatist*: I see I'm down for fifteen shillings for cards this month. Beastly bad luck! Now, if only I had gone two royals instead of three hearts in that first game last night—— (Proceeds to hold a post-mortem, to which nobody pays the slightest attention.)

*The Amorist*: I've got four quid left! Come along, girls! Who's going to marry me for my money?

*The Artillerist*: I hope that now you fellows have got your pay, you'll all subscribe to the Gunnery Prizes Fund. I want to put up something for a Morris-tube competition.

*The Humorist*: Take my all. Here's tuppence!

*The Sensualist*: I see the messman is charging threepence for jam at seven-bell tea. Well, it's worth it. It's lovely jam!

*The Optimist*: Well, I must say it's a fine thing to have it all worked out for you like this. And on the last day of the month, too! Pay, you're the most efficient paymaster I've ever been shipmates with. You fix it all up, and pay our money, and take our money, without our feeling it one little bit. Why, it's a pleasure to pay mess-bills in this ship. Just like having a tooth out under gas—rather a delightful sensation than otherwise. I don't know how you do it, I'm sure.

*The Paymaster*: Oh, I forgot to mention that

the mess-bills have not been taken out of it this month, as they usually are. They have still to be paid.

*All* (horror-stricken): What?

*The Paymaster*: Yes; you see, the new scale of income-tax comes into force now. Of course, if any of you want an advance——

*The Humorist*: Oh! Lloyd George, Lloyd George! You little know what damage you have done!



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## 11. *The Burning Question*

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THE chief actor in the following drama is a gentleman who has joined the Navy for the duration of the war. His precise rank need not be specified. He is hereunder denoted simply by the initials R.N.V.R. He is bubbling with zeal, and efficient to the last button of his brand-new British-warm. Also, he is thirsty for information. The officers with whom he converses are very numerous, and it would bore you horribly to have to remember all their names and ranks, so we will just call them Heedless Chatterer, 1, 2, 3, etc.

*R.N.V.R.* (enters wardroom and sits down alongside *H.C. 1*): I say, let me hear your opinion, will you? Do you think——

*H.C. 1*: Oh, you're just up from the village, aren't you? Did you go and see *To-night's the Night*?

*R.N.V.R.*: Yes, I saw it. Ripping thing. But do you think they——

*H.C. 1*: By Jove! I would just like to see a revue again. Lucky beggar, you. I suppose you must have had about a week in Town before joining up, didn't you?

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*Grand Fleet Days*

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*R.N.V.R.*: Not a week; only five days. Do you think they will——

*H.C. 1*: Only five days! I wish to goodness I could get five days. Here, P.M.O., how much do you want to square you to give me a drop of sick leave? I'll go sick with any disease you like to name. Choose the one you are most interested in. I'm your man!

*R.N.V.R.*: Surely you don't mean that? You don't want to go sick, do you? But you haven't answered my question. Do you think they will come——

*H.C. 1*: All very well for you to talk like that. You haven't spent weary months at this silly game like I have. What was it you were asking me?

*R.N.V.R.*: I want to know—Do you think they will come out?

*H.C. 1*: Who come out? Come out where?

*R.N.V.R.*: Why, the German fleet, of course.

*H.C. 1*: Oh, I d'know. (Yawns and departs.)  
(Enter *H.C. 2*.)

*R.N.V.R.*: Oh, I say, let me ask you. Perhaps you——

*H.C. 2*: What about me doing some asking? You are our latest source of information from the civilised world. Just come from London, haven't you? Did you see anything of the Zeppies?

*R.N.V.R.*: Oh, yes; I saw them. In fact, I was right on the spot in the last raid. But—do you think they will ever come out?

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*H.C. 2*: Not while the winter lasts. Zeppies don't like wind or snow, or even rain; but they may come again some time.

*R.N.V.R.*: Oh, I didn't mean them. I meant——

*H.C. 2*: But we were talking about Zeppies, weren't we? Don't hop from one subject to another like a blithering dicky-bird. My brain won't stand it. Now then, what is it you *do* mean?

*R.N.V.R.*: The High Seas fleet—do you think they will ever come out?

*H.C. 2*: Oh, *them*! (Yawns and departs.)

*R.N.V.R.* (also drifts away, and presently way-lays *H.C. 3*): Do you think——

*H.C. 3*: No, I don't think! It's gone past thought, and if I knew any words bad enough to say, I'd say 'em. Here's that lout of a captain of the quarter-deck gone and rubbed his beastly breeches all along the new enamel of the after-turret! Just been put on, too! Stupid ass! He ought to be disrated to ordinary seaman!

*R.N.V.R.*: Surely paint is a small matter in war time?

*H.C. 3*: Paint a small matter! Look here, young feller-me-lad, how long have you been in the Service?

*R.N.V.R.*: Just a fortnight. Not too late, I hope, to fight the German fleet. Do you think they will come out?

*H.C. 3*: I'm blessed if I know, and I'm blessed

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*Grand Fleet Days*

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if I care ! All I know is that the after-turret now looks like a bally patchwork quilt, and I've no more enamel left in the ship.

R.N.V.R. turns sadly away, convinced that the Navy is in a thoroughly bad way. But, then, the Germans used to think that, too !

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## 12. *Crabbed Age and Youth*

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A PATHETIC little drama of deep human interest, featuring the Chief and the P.M.O., two venerable greybeards and co-fathers of the mess; also the newly-joined, eighteen-year-old subaltern of Marines—known as the War Baby, and Dogsboddy—a youthful Assistant-Paymaster for three years or the duration of the war.

Scene : The wardroom. Time : After dinner.

*Chief* (who, with his fellow-ancient, is alone in the wardroom): Well, I don't know what you think about it, P.M.O., but to my mind the Service is becoming an unfit place for any one who has come to years of discretion. The mess is bought up by a lot of children, these days! You can't get any intelligent conversation; you can't even get a quiet game of cards! The whole place is entirely given over to a lot of youngsters, who ought properly to be in the nursery!

*P.M.O.*: You're right, Chief. Why, I remember the time when the youngsters would never dream of doing the things they're allowed to do now. When I first joined the Service, a two-striped officer would no more dream of sitting in

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## Grand Fleet Days

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an armchair if a senior officer was in the mess than he would have thought of flying! But nowadays you find them lolling and sprawling in all the most comfortable armchairs, while the three-striper has to take a high chair or else go to his cabin!

*Chief*: What I notice most is that they take nothing seriously. They're all for play the whole time. You never see them with a book in their hands unless it's some trashy novel; and all the time when they should be studying their job they're just looking out for some fresh way of amusing themselves.

*P.M.O.*: The fact is, Chief, we're getting too old for a naval mess. It isn't altogether the youngsters' fault that we feel out of it all; it's largely due to the fact that we have outgrown their ideas and amusements. I daresay, in our day, we were much the same as they are, really!

*Chief*: Yes, I suppose that's it. Youth will be served. Childishness no longer appeals to us, simply because we are no longer children.

(Enter Dogsboddy and the War Baby, the latter holding a large cardboard box.)

*War Baby*: Yes, one of my aunts sent it to me, dear old soul. Thought it would amuse me, I suppose. I don't know what to do with the blessed thing. I think I'll send it for'ard to the sick-bay; it may help the patients to forget their troubles.

*P.M.O.* (looking up quickly): What's that you say about the sick-bay?

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*War Baby*: Oh, nothing, sir. I'm only talking about a game I've had sent me.

*P.M.O.*: Humph! A game!

*Dogsbody*: Let's have a look at the silly thing. Set it out on the table. One board, ten pink ships, and ten blue ones, and one book of the words. We might as well try it, just to see if it's any good, eh?

*War Baby*: All right; nothing else to do. Come on; I'll be old Tirpitz, and see if I can strafe you.

(Ten minutes later.)

*Dogsbody*: No; that's not right.

*War Baby*: Yes, it is.

*Dogsbody*: No, it isn't.

*P.M.O.* (putting down a paper): What on earth are you two squabbling about?

*Dogsbody*: I appeal to you, sir. Doesn't it say that a ship is sunk when—but if you wouldn't mind reading the rules yourself.

*P.M.O.* (reading): Well, I don't know; it seems quite a debatable point. I say, Chief, come here a minute. How do you read this?

*Chief*: What is it all about? (Takes the rules and reads them.)

*P.M.O.* (sitting himself down in the War Baby's chair): The whole point is this: Supposing I move here, and you don't go for the destroyer, are you entitled to sink me or not?

*Chief*: I must see it more closely. (Takes

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## Grand Fleet Days

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Dogsbody's chair.) H'm! What was the last move? Oh, there; eh? You did that?

*P.M.O.*: Yes; and now I claim that I can go on and have another move with the same ship.

*Chief*: But I shouldn't have made that move at all. I can see a much more wily scheme. I'm going to move here, see? Now I believe I've got you bending!

*P.M.O.*: So you have! No, you haven't, though; I'm blessed if you have! See? I'm going to move here. That gets out of it all right.

(Enter a Writer, with many memos.)

*Writer* (to *Chief*): For you, sir.

*Chief*: Oh, take it away, and bring it to me some other time! Can't you see I'm busy?

*P.M.O.*: There's a lot in this game, when you come to look into it. Go on, *Chief*; it's your move.

*Chief*: Well, I don't know. What's the use of finishing off a game half-way through? Suppose we start afresh?

*P.M.O.*: Right you are, young feller-me-lad.

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*War Baby* (leaving the wardroom in company with *Dogsbody*): Well, thank goodness, some one's found a use for it. Come on, *Dogsbody*; let's have a good solid hour at French together.



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### 13. *Divided Attention*

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THE Senior Member of the Mess, besides being a specialist in his own particular job, unfortunately considers himself a specialist also in bee-keeping. The fact that he has never been near a hive in his life—except once, and then he was badly stung,—makes no difference.

The Junior Member has a great many curious and interesting reminiscences, some of which he is now heard relating to a messmate.

The poor Middleman would like to chip in to Junior's conversation, but is being button-holed by Senior, in the manner of the Wedding Guest in the *Ancient Mariner*.

*Senior*: You see, bee-keeping is not a pastime—it's a science; and it's no good your taking it up unless you're prepared to learn something about it. If you, for instance, were to start keeping bees—

*Junior* (whose words are uttered at the same time as the above): And I give you my word I had the highest old time in all my life; simply ripping! I hope to go there again the very next time we ever give leave, and if I can get any one to come with me—

*Middleman* : By Jove ! wouldn't I just like to !

*Senior* : Would you, really ? Like to keep bees ? I didn't know that you were really interested in the subject.

*Middleman* : Oh—er—that is to say—oh, yes, frightfully keen about it ! Awfully topping little creatures—bees !

*Senior* : I must lend you some books about them.

*Junior* : But I don't know what to do about the letters. It rather goes against my grain to destroy them, but——

*Middleman* : I should burn 'em, every one of 'em !

*Senior* : Oh, well, I'm not going to lend you any books if you mean to burn them.

*Middleman* : I'm sure I never said so, sir. I should enjoy reading them.

*Senior* : Of course, they are a little bit dry ; but if you want to study the matter seriously, you must read books written in a scientific manner. Maeterlinck, now, is very fascinating and poetical, but he's not systematic—not scientific. You want to begin with some solid elementary textbook.

*Junior* : There was I with the girl left on my hands for the whole afternoon. I didn't know how to amuse her. She couldn't talk, couldn't rag, couldn't do anything. What would you do in such a case ?

*Senior* : Of course, to begin with, you must get

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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hold of a good queen bee; and, mark you, she requires very careful management.

*Middleman* : I should buy her a big box of chocolates, and stuff her with them till she couldn't see out of her eyes.

*Senior* : Oh, well, if you're going to make a jest of the whole thing it's no good my going any further. Sorry; I thought you were really interested.

*Middleman* : My dear sir, of course I am ! Don't know what could have induced me to make such a silly remark ! Must have been thinking of something else for the moment. Tell me, what kind of hive do you recommend as the best sort ?

*Senior* : Nothing like the good old-fashioned straw skep; it really answers every requirement, and——

*Junior* : I made my escape at last, and took a straight line for the local pub. Not a bad little place——

*Middleman* : The worst of it is, there's no billiard-room attached to it.

*Senior* : Billiard-room—in a bee-hive ?

*Middleman* : No breathing-room, I said. Those straw hives always seem to me so stuffy.

*Senior* : But, don't you know, bees work their own ventilating system ? They fan the air with their wings, and so keep up a constant circulation.

*Middleman* : Clever little beggars !

*Junior* : But I couldn't get a drink—all on account of the new regulations——

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*Senior* : You must keep them well supplied with nourishment during the winter——

*Middleman* : I can't see that a mild whisky-and-soda can do much harm at any time.

*Senior* : Oh, confound you ! I shan't talk to you any more ! (Exit in a huff.)

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## 14. *Mary and John*

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**J**OHN is a lieutenant; Mary is a girl. A tea-party is in progress in the ward-room.

*John*: And, of course, the Service alone is quite sufficient for any man, without having a wife to look after as well. In fact, I don't consider that a naval man has any right to marry. It's only those slackers who haven't got enough to do that think about marrying. I've always noticed that, directly a man gets married, he gives up all interest in his work, the ship, and everything else.

*Mary*: I think you're quite right. So very sensible of you to take such a view. It is so rare to find a really sensible man nowadays. What a handsome fellow your commander is, isn't he?

*John*: H'm! I hadn't noticed it. Perhaps you're right.

*Mary*: Really! Do you think that's quite pretty of you to put it like that—"perhaps I'm right"?

*John*: Oh, I say, come now; I didn't mean that. Of course, "you're right," I should have said.

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Mary*: Thank you—that's better; though I do think his beard spoils him, don't you? And I'm not sure that I altogether care for dark eyes.

*John* (who is clean-shaven and extremely fair, to himself): There's a good deal of common sense about this girl. (Aloud): What colour eyes do you like?

*Mary*: Oh, if it's going to be a game of confessions, my turn comes first. What colour eyes do *you* like best? (Perhaps it is unnecessary to note the fact that with these words Mary turns her face so as to get a really good light on it.)

*John*: Me? Oh, I prefer dark blue—no—violet, I mean—hang me, if they ain't grey!

*Mary*: Really, you seem very undecided in your opinions. But I think that's much the best way, after all. I never can admire those men who are positive about every subject under the sun, can you? I think it shows narrow-mindedness. Now, I have a cousin—Reggie; he's a second-lieutenant. I do think the Army's perfectly splendid, don't you?

*John*: Yes—confound 'em! I beg pardon—I meant “yes”—er—just “yes.”

*Mary*: I should like you to meet Cousin Reggie. He is so good-looking! And so brave; and such a dear!—

*John* (to himself): Various remarks, which cannot be printed, about Reggie.

*Mary*: And he's frightfully keen on my very

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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best pal ! I shouldn't wonder if they were married in a month or so, and I shall be her bridesmaid.

*John* : I'm sure he must be a top-hole chap. Hope I shall come across him one of these days.

*Mary* : Perhaps you might come to the wedding ! Wouldn't you like to see me in my bridesmaid's dress ? Oh, but what a silly thing of me to say ! You will think me awfully—er—forward and unmaidenly and all that, won't you ? And I forgot that you don't approve of marriage.

*John* : Not on general grounds, that's all ; and then only with regard to naval men. Lucky beggars—those soldiers ! I say, do you really feel so frightfully keen on the Army ?

*Mary* : Of course I do ; but I think I like the Navy better !

*John* : That's right. Stick to that.

*Mary* : Yes, I always love the little middies so. Do you know that one of yours with the curly hair and blue eyes ? Isn't he too sweet for words ? Impudent young monkey ! Do you know he actually squeezed my hand when he was introduced to me at the top of the gangway ? Wasn't it daring of him ?

*John* (who happens to be in charge of the midshipmen, to himself) : I'll see that he gets an extra hour's physical drill to-morrow morning. That'll teach him.

*Mary* : Oh, don't think me a nuisance, will you, but this bracelet of mine is hurting dread-

fully, and I can't undo the clasp by myself. Would you mind——?

John finds it necessary to get a purchase on Mary's hand while getting to work on the bracelet—which, by the way, has a perfectly loose and easy clasp. He takes some time over the job.

*Mary*: Do you know, I almost think you're hurting more than the bracelet. How strong you are. Tell me—do you often have tea-parties on board?

*John*: Fairly often. I don't generally take part in them, though; they bore me stiff.

*Mary* (with ten-below-freezing hauteur): Really! I'm sorry.

*John* (on whom the hauteur has been entirely thrown away because he didn't notice it): But, somehow, I've quite enjoyed myself this afternoon. Dunno why it is, but it seems to be different.

*Mary*: Perhaps it is because we have had a little intelligent conversation, don't you think? It is so rare that one finds any one who can talk anything but mere frivol—any man, I mean.

*John*: Any girl, I was going to say; but, as you remark, this hasn't been quite the same as other tea-parties, has it?

*Mary*: I shall never forget it! Those chocolate éclairs were lovely!

*John* (to himself): Now, what the deuce did she mean by that?



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*Mary*: Look! the others are getting their coats; it must be time to go. I must put mine on, too. Oh, thank you!

\* \* \* \* \*

(An Hour Later.)

*John* (to a messmate): I say, do you think a man can marry on a lieutenant's pay?

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## 15. *Our Magazine*

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OUR Enthusiastic One, who is always evolving new schemes in order to “put a little ginger into things,” as he poetically expresses it, has a new idea for promoting the happiness of the mess. He proceeds to unfold it as follows :—

*Enthusiast*: I say, what about getting up a mess paper? Good scheme—eh—what? We had a jolly good one in my last ship——

*An Obstructionist*: Oh, beat it! We’ve heard enough about the old Nonesuch!

*A Cheery One*: Not at all. For my part, I feel very much interested in hearing about it. Tell us a little more about your ship’s paper, will you?

*Enthusiast*: Oh, well, there isn’t much to tell. We called it the *North Sea Times*, and had it jelly-graphed in the ship’s office.

*The Obstructionist*: Who ran the thing?

*Enthusiast* (modestly): Well, as a matter of fact, I myself was the editor.

*The Obstructionist*: I guessed as much! And

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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now, of course, you want to inflict a similar atrocity on us?

*The Cheery One*: Well, I call it a good egg. Let's have one, by all means. What name could we choose for it?

*A Facetious One*: Call it the *Watchers and Waiters' Gazette*, or *Homeless Fleet Journal*.

*The Cheery One*: Oh, I say, don't be depressed! Why, you'll be so bucked when you read all the funny bits in it that you won't want to go on leave!

*Another Pessimist*: Who's going to write all the stuff?

*Enthusiast*: Why, you, for one. I hope that everybody will try and write something so as to make it thoroughly representative. That's what killed the thing in my last ship; people chucked their hands in after a time, and got too lazy to write anything. In the end—at our last number, that is—I had to write the whole blessed thing myself, just like a proper editor of a real shore-going paper. But I hadn't the time for it, and so I had to let it drop.

*The Facetious One*: I don't mind writing "Aunt Deborah's" column. You must have that; no properly-conducted paper is complete without it! You know the sort of thing: "My dear chicks,—I will tell you this week a pretty story of a pussy-cat. This is all the space the editor will let me have until next week. Your loving Aunt Deborah."

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*A Serious Member* : I could write you a series of articles on the new navigation; it would be a great help to our junior "snotties." I shouldn't want more than five or six pages in each number, and I daresay about fifty articles would exhaust all the more elementary part of the subject.

*Enthusiast* (dubiously, and already beginning to experience the troubles of an editor's life) : Thank you; I don't altogether think that that is quite the sort of thing we should want. Perhaps if you could condense your subject into, say, one page, or, better still, half a page, and throw in a few jokes with it, now——?

*The Serious One* (in a huff) : Oh, of course, if you're just going to have a kind of tomfool paper—I'd have you to know that the new navigation is not a subject to be treated jestingly.

*The Cheery One* : I wouldn't mind writing some poetry for you. I'm rather a dab at poetry; can chuck it off my chest at the rate o' knots. How would something of this sort do?

Oh, here we are, the great Grand Fleet,  
But not a German can we meet;  
They are so frightfully discreet——

*The Obstructionist* :

And suffer greatly from cold feet

—Yow! Get off my face, Cheery!

*All* : Hooray, a scrap! Come on, you take this

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*Wardroom Dialogues*

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side.—Have at you for a scurrl K-nave ! Look out for those glasses——

(At this point, as the reporters at a Peace Conference say, “the meeting broke up amid general confusion.”)

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## 16. *Our Debating Society*

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SOME energetic spirits in the mess have inaugurated a Wardroom Debating Society.

This is the first meeting, and to celebrate the occasion the Admiral and the Captain have been invited as guests. The Society is formed on strict Parliamentary lines, with speaker, secretary, and other trimmings. A member has just concluded the opening speech.

*The Speaker* (Lieut. Browne-Jones): Gentlemen, now that Mr. Dashblank has concluded his speech, I will remind you that, by the rules of our Society, no member may speak more than once, and no speeches may last more than five minutes. The subject, "Should Women be Allowed the Vote?" is now open to debate.

(Sits down. A dead silence follows for several minutes. Then—)

*The Admiral* (rising slowly from his chair): Well, as nobody seems inclined to speak, I may as well try and say a few words on the subject—(applause). It seems to me the women have done deucedly well in this war, driving motors and making munitions and all that sort of thing—

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*The Captain* (aside): Not before we wanted them, too!

*The Admiral*: Eh? What's that you say?

*The Captain* (also rising): I was merely remarking, sir, that we want all the munitions we can possibly get. I don't care who makes them—women or men.

*The Admiral*: Well, we've got enough now.

*The Captain*: I doubt it.

*The Admiral*: There's a certain limit. Come, come! I remember when I was out in the Crimea, in '54, when the forts replied to our fire. I was in the old *Himalaya* then.

*The Captain*: Wasn't she re-named the *Hibernia* afterwards?

*The Admiral*: No; that was the old *Achilles* you're thinking about. We were, you may remember, the first ship in the Navy to introduce armour.

*The Captain*: And a big mistake, too, in my opinion.

*The Admiral*: Not at all. Why do you say that?

*The Captain*: Because I'm against the principle of armour altogether, except deck armour, perhaps.

*The Admiral*: Oh, you're thinking of long-range actions. But all actions need not necessarily be fought at extreme ranges. Suppose you found yourself obliged to fight at close range, then, where would your unarmoured ship be?

*The Captain*: I should have better guns than

the other fellow; less weight on the ship's side.

*The Speaker* (timidly): The question before the House is——

*The Captain*: It's just like tennis—a good hard and rapid hitter has the game in his own hands, and——

*The Admiral*: Tennis—a girl's game! In my young days, cricket was thought good enough. Our wardroom eleven, now, in the old *Nonesuch*, used to take on the best team they could put up on shore at every place we went to; and, by gad! sir, we licked 'em—licked 'em every time!

*The Captain*: Well, sir, no doubt you had a very fine team, but in my opinion cricket is better to-day than ever it was. Remember the match we played last year against the Holes's Hole XI? Where could you see finer batting and fielding than that, eh?

*The Speaker*: The question before the House is——

*The Admiral*: No, I can't agree with you. Cricket has gone down, and do you know why? Because young men nowadays are crazed about motor-cycling.

*The Captain*: Well, you can't deny that motors are a very useful invention.

*The Admiral*: Oh, yes; I grant you that. I'm not prejudiced. In fact, I'm very fond of motor-ing myself. And I'm just going to buy a little Ford-Fiat.



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*The Captain* : I shouldn't do that, sir. If you take my advice, you'll get a Tate car; they're by far the best.

*The Admiral* : Do you think so now?

*The Speaker* : The question——

*The Admiral* : Yes, yes, of course, Votes for Women! Well, gentlemen, it has been a very interesting debate. I hope we may have many more such. What did you say, Mr. Speaker, was the point in question?

*The Speaker* (tactfully) : I think, sir, the most pressing question now before the house is—Will you have a whisky-and-soda? I should like one myself.

(The rest of the evening was spent in harmony.)

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## 17. *The Morning Hate*

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THIS is really more of a monologue than a dialogue. The speaker shall be nameless—unless you like to call him the Awful Example—partly because he can be found in more ships than one, and partly because it is just possible that we are all of us a bit like him on occasions. The scene is the breakfast-table, and the time is a quarter to nine, just when the wardroom servants are beginning to think about clearing away. It is at this moment that the speaker enters.

“Breakfast, please. Breakfast, I said! Give me something to eat, quickly! Here have I been shouting for the last ten minutes and can’t get a single thing! Waiter!

“What did you say, Jones—‘Good-morning’? No, I do not think it is a good morning. I think it is a very bad morning. I think it is a most unpleasant morning. And even if it were a good morning, I do not wish to have my attention called to such a fact by my messmates at this early hour!”

*A Voice:* Whoa, beauty!

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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“Waiter, this toast is as hard as a brick! Take it away and bring me some fresh!”

*Waiter*: There isn’t any more, sir.

“Send the messman to me at once—no, I’ll see him later. This matter wants going into thoroughly. The way the meals are run in this ship! And get me some more coffee; this lot is stone-cold.”

*A Voice* (mildly remonstrating): You know you’re a little late this morning; everything was hot half an hour ago.

“And if I am late, isn’t there a good reason for it? Wouldn’t you be late, too, if you had passed a sleepless night like I have? It is perfectly impossible to get a wink of sleep in this ship. No sooner had I dropped off than a gang of ruffians assembled on deck, right over my head, with brooms—or, I should say, with parts of brooms—which they proceeded to fit together by hammering them on the deck. Just like a maxim gun, it was, only about a million times louder. I dashed up from my cabin in my pyjamas—might have caught my death of cold, and probably shall—and spoke forcibly to the captain of the quarter-deck. A nice fellow he is to be a petty-officer! I intend to put him in the report, and hope he gets disgraced. What do you think? I actually caught sight of some of his men grinning at me, and he had not sufficient command over them to prevent such an outrage! If I’m to be disturbed in the dead of night by a mob of broom-thumping brutes,

with their idiotic faces convulsed in imbecile grins——”

*A Voice*: But the hands didn't turn out until seven o'clock!

“H'm! And what has that got to do with it? Would they have had any more consideration if the hour had been five, or four, or three, or two, or one? Waiter, where are those eggs? Are they coming, or are they not?”

*Waiter*: Sorry, sir, but you didn't order any eggs.

“Didn't order any! I distinctly remember ordering them. And, besides, even if I didn't, surely it stands to reason that I require some breakfast! . . . Hasn't the mail come yet? Upon my word, the postman gets later and later each day. He's a useless ullage, that man, and ought to go back to duty.”

*Waiter*: Mail's been here some time, sir. Three letters for you.

“H'm!” (Opening a letter.) “Ha, ha, ha! Waiter, never mind about breakfast; you must be wanting to clear away. By Jove! a ripping morning, isn't it? Sunshine, and all that. There's nothing like turning out early to make a man feel fresh. If it hadn't been for a noise overhead, which awoke me, I should have been bad-tempered and mouldy, just like all you blighters. Blessed if I don't give the captain of the quarter-deck five bob for waking me!” (Looks at his letter again.) “Well, there's one thing to be said for

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*Wardroom Dialogues*

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this ship—no one need be ashamed of asking people on board. Decent food, and a decent place to bring people to. I say, anybody, all of you, help me out, will you? I've got a luncheon party at one o'clock. Will you all come to it?"

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## 18. *Chinaside*

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**T**HE leading hand of this dialogue may really hail from any of the foreign stations; as a general type, he comes from them all, but the one from Chinaside is, perhaps, the most virulent of the lot, and so we will let him spread himself a bit. It is just as well to let him, because you cannot stop him.

*Homewaters*: By Jove! it can blow in this place! It's as much as you can do to stand on deck!

*Chinabird*: Blow! You call this blowing? You ought to have been out in Hong-Kong in a typhoon. Why, I've seen a man suddenly taken up by the wind from the main street of Kowloon and landed on the verandah of the Peak Hotel! Fact!

*Homewaters*: H'm! Well, this wind is quite enough for me. It's a confounded nuisance. I made arrangements to get a little shooting this afternoon, but it's no use going in this weather.

*Chinabird*: What sort of shooting?

*Homewaters*: Oh, the wily snipe.

*Chinabird*: Snipe? Snipe, did you say? I only wish I had the snipe-shooting now that I used to get on the Yang-tse in nought-seven.

One morning, I went out before breakfast and bagged forty.

*Homewaters* : How many guns were there ?

*Chinabird* : Oh, only myself !

*Homewaters* : What, twenty couple of snipe to your own gun ?

*Chinabird* : Forty, I said ; forty couple, of course. Ah, the shootin' we used to get in the old *Kent* ! Duck ! I give you my word I've seen the skies simply black with duck ! There was one Chink boy who always used to go out with me. He knew just when the duck were flightin' ; used to come on board and ask for me, and off we would go. Rarely came back without the whaler full up to the gunwale with duck !

*Homewaters* : Well, it sounds very nice, but meanwhile I must put up with what I can get here, if only the weather will ease up a little. Anyhow, I think I'll go and tell my servant to get my gear ready.

*Chinabird* : Better see to it yourself ; he'll be sure to forget something. Now, the only servants in the world that are any use at all are the boys you get on the China station. Nothing like a Chink for a good servant ! Our fellow that we had—Ah-Foo—I tell you, there was nothing that chap couldn't do. You only had to say, for instance, " Ah-Foo, twenty-piecee people coming lunch one hour, plenty good chop, can do ? " He would always say, " Can do, sah," and you could be certain of sitting down to a topping lunch !

Or, supposing you wanted to get hold of some old Ming ware—Ah-Foo would produce you any amount in less than no time!

*Homewaters*: Very interesting, but what I'm worrying about is—supposing this beastly weather clears, and I do manage to get a week-end; how am I going to do it on one-and-ninepence, and pay for my cartridges out of it, too?

*Chinabird*: That's the curse of it. Being in England, your pay always runs out to a clinch long before the end of the month. Now, out in China, I used to make two or three quid a month out of the exchange alone! You see, you get paid in dollars out there, and all you have to do is to remit to your bank at home, and then draw a cheque on the local bank, and if the exchange is good you can make any amount. Why, when we were cruising up and down between Wei-Hai and Shanghai, you could just go on making money all the time, owing to the different rates of exchange!

*Homewaters*: I shall go ashore and change at the club, I think.

*Chinabird*: Club? Pot-house, you mean! Most depressing places, the clubs home here—even the best of 'em. You ought to see the Shanghai Club, or the one at Hong-Kong! Some comfort about those, I tell you! Very good one at Singapore, too; anywhere, in fact, on the station. China's the place, after all! Everything's good out on that station. Fine people, the Chinese. Some of the best times I've had in the Service have been



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*Wardroom Dialogues*

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out Chinaside. You can't beat it! Beautiful station for food, for sport, games—everything! I only wish I was out in China now!

*Homewaters* (even a worm will turn): I wish to Heaven you were!

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## 19. *Knubbly Bits*

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**T**IME, 9 a.m. H.M. cruiser *Sniffancatchit* has just moored, after five days at sea.

*Lieut. Brown* : Well, let's hope we shall be allowed a day or two's peace after flogging the blighted ocean perpetual and incessant. I'm fed up on 'Un-'unting. Who's coming ashore this afternoon?

*Lieut. Jones* : What's the good of going ashore in a grisly spot like this? Better live in the midst of a what-it's-name than dwell in this horrible thingamajig, as the poet says.

*Lieut. Brown* : Oh, I dunno. We might try and get a car, and run out to the Swish golf course; it's only about seventeen miles.

*Lieut. Jones* : Right-o! You pay for the car, and I'll put up the tea. That's fair, eh?

*Lieut. Brown* : Je ne pense pas! But I'll cut you for it, if you like. What's that, signalman? Bring it here.

(Signalman solemnly presents his signal pad, and if this were the movies you would now see thrown on the screen—)

“*Sniffancatchit* to complete to full stowage immediately. Collier will be alongside at 9.30.”

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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The silent cinema would also save you from hearing Lieut. Brown's remarks, let alone Lieut. Jones's, which were worse still.

*Lieut. Brown :* Suffering Mike ! And I had the middle watch ! What jolly times you gay sailors do have !

*Lieut. Jones :* Vive le Hig Lif ! I bet you a dollar we shall have to sweep some blighted collier that's been playing Fringes of the Fleet with half the ships in the harbour already. Just our luck !

*Lieut. Brown :* Or else have to break bulk. I don't know which is worse.

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(Some hours later, during the dinner-hour.)

*Guns :* Who's the officer in charge of the forehold ? You, Torps, isn't it ? Well, if I were to attempt to epitomise your efforts during this forenoon, I should say you had made a proper pot-mess of it !

*Torps :* You would ? I, on the other hand, not having been brought up at Whale Island, but amongst gentlemen, beg to inform you that——

(If any misguided people should think of acting this dialogue as a drawing-room play, I might say that the stage directions at this point are : They scrap. Several chairs are broken. Guns finally falls to the deck, whereupon three other officers sit on his chest and stomach and call for beer.)

*Guns* (much cheered after the pleasant interlude) : Well, what did we do in the last hour ?

*Torps* (in the Harry Tate manner) : Oh, a

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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couple of hundred or so—two-fifty or three hundred !

*Guns* : Torps, if I have to speak to you again—  
What did we do, really ?

*Torps* : One-twenty-three, making four hundred and eighty up to date.

*Guns* : And we've got to take in seven hundred altogether ! What's the good of it ? We only burn it when we've got it !

*Torps* : Nasty, black, messy stuff, too ! To look at me now, you would scarcely believe that I was one of the handsomest fellows—if not the handsomest—in the British Navy, would you ? Remove this outer coating that now enshrouds my face, and you would behold the *Pride of George Street* and the *Palm Court's Delight* !

*Guns* : I should keep it on if I were you.

(Stage directions much the same as before.)

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(Some hours later, the collier has just shoved off, but several hoists are still stacked up on the upper deck, where the playful sailormen are already beginning to make merry with hoses.)

*Lieut. Jones* : Well, thank goodness, that's over ! And when we've had the usual rude signal from the Admiral for not beating the flagship with about half her hands, we may settle down in peace and quiet for a few days.

*Lieut. Brown* : Yes, and for being honest and not faking our returns ! In the flagship they add on the date of the month and the commander's

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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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age to the hourly average, and—— Ah, here is the signal !

(Enter a signal man.)

*Lieut. Jones* (reads): “H.M.S. *Sniffancatchit* will take in stores and provisions immediately, and will then proceed to sea.” Me for the gay life ! Oh, we have had a pleasant day, haven’t we ?

*Lieut. Brown* : Much nicer than golf, isn’t it ?

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## 20. *The War Game*

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THIS being the final dialogue of the series, the author, in a generous mood, is giving you what practically amounts to a four-act play. And there is a moral lesson thrown in gratis. The *dramatis personæ* are : Males, Lieut. Smith and Friend ; female (if she will pardon the expression), Lady Eglantine Wildrose. Now we're away.)

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### EPISODE I.—SCENE, A WARDROOM

*Lieut. Smith :* I say, what is one to do about this ? The skipper has just sent along a chit to ask if I'll come and play the war game with him in his cabin after dinner.

*And Friend :* You'll have to show a little interest, I suppose ; there's no getting out of it. Is he very keen on it ?

*Lieut. Smith :* Keen on it ? What, on the war game ? I should just say he was. He spends half his time, when he's not on the bridge, pushing about a lot of beastly little bits of brass on a board and working out problems. Disgusting, I

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## Wardroom Dialogues

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call it ! And I had promised to play Van John this evening.

*And Friend* : Oh, well, you'll have to make the best of it. Can't you work up any amusement out of the game ?

*Lieut. Smith* : Not a little bit. I don't mind fighting Germans—if they ever give us the chance—but to go fooling about with a silly toy—a mere parlour game, I call it. Pooh !

*And Friend* (who is of rather a studious disposition) : Well, if you can't get the real thing, you must make the best of what you can get ; and, besides, there's always something to be learnt, I suppose ?

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### EPISODE II.—ON THE QUARTER-DECK DURING A DANCE

*Lieut. Smith* : Do you really mean that ?

*Lady E.* : Silly boy ! What a question to ask ! How can I tell what I mean ?

*Lieut. Smith* : Then I shall think you mean what I hope you mean. But you know what I mean, don't you ?

*Lady E.* : Oh, how frightfully complicated you are getting, with all those "means" ; you're making my head ache terribly !

*Lieut. Smith* : No ! Am I, really ? Oh, I say, I am sorry ! But, Lady Eglantine—I say, Eglantine—you don't mind my calling you that, do you ?

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## Grand Fleet Days

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*Lady E.* : What ?

*Lieut. Smith* : “ Eglantine.”

*Lady E.* (demurely) : That is what I was christened.

*Lieut. Smith* : Eglantine, do you really mean that I may write to you ?

*Lady E.* : It would always give me great pleasure to hear of your welfare.

*Lieut. Smith* : Oh, skittles !—No, I didn’t mean to say that. But look here, Eglantine (taking her hand), will you write to me sometimes, too ?

*Lady E.* : I won’t promise.

*Lieut. Smith* : But you will, won’t you ?

*Lady E.* : Do you really want me to ?

(This episode really proceeds to a further length, but sufficient of it has been given just to show its general trend.)

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### EPISODE III.—IN LIEUT. SMITH’S CABIN

(Six Months Later.)

*Lieut. Smith* : Oh, it can’t be true ! It’s impossible !

*And Friend* : Let’s read it ; I haven’t seen it yet. (Takes a newspaper from the table and reads.) “ A marriage has been arranged and will shortly take place between Lady Eglantine Wildrose, third daughter of the Earl of Wildrose, and Mr. Pogram K. Hunks, of Detroit, U.S.A.” Well, old man, what about it ?



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## *Wardroom Dialogues*

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*Lieut. Smith*: Engaged! And to such a man!

*And Friend*: Well, why not?

*Lieut. Smith*: That girl! Eglantine! Don't you remember her? Only six months ago she was at our dance on board!

*And Friend*: Oh, yes, I remember. But I don't see why you should feel so cut up about it. You didn't expect her to become engaged to you, did you?

*Lieut. Smith* (groaning): But if you only knew—the things she said to me—the letters I've had from her!

*And Friend*: Tough luck, old man, but buck up; you'll get over it!

*Lieut. Smith*: But why—why—why did she—  
(And so on.)

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### EPISODE IV.—IN THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

(Some six months later still.)

*And Friend*: I suppose the old man will be here presently?

*Lieut. Smith*: Yes; do you think we have time for a short game before he comes?

*And Friend*: Why, you're getting quite an enthusiast about the war game now!

*Lieut. Smith*: Well, I quite recognise what you used to say about it—"If you can't get the real thing you must make the best of what you can

get; and, besides, there's always something to be learnt." Do you remember saying that?

*And Friend:* I do. But how did you come to realise the truth of my weighty words?

*Lieut. Smith:* By being one of the pieces.

*And Friend:* I don't quite follow.

*Lieut. Smith:* Don't you remember Mrs. Hunks—Lady Eglantine that was? She gave me an able exposition of—the war game!

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## *XVI. A Floating Village*

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OUR ship, you must understand, is something more than a machine for fighting Germans ; it is a floating village, with all the traditions, the class distinctions, the humours and the tragedies that are found in any village ashore. We have our politicians, our Socialists, our football matches and our feasts ; the upper deck takes the place of the village green for an evening stroll when the day's work is over, and at such times an engine-room artificer would no more think of walking with a stoker petty-officer, or a sergeant of marines with a leading signalman, than the local builder and contractor of Wapshott-Monachorum in Wessex would be seen in company with the local butcher. And the feeling between Wapshott-Monachorum and King's-Pridlington is exactly akin to the emulation between our ship and our next astern in the line.

We have our privileges, our unwritten laws, with which no wise man would dream of interfering ; we pass censure or approval quite independently of the decisions of constituted authority ; what is considered flagrantly wrong by the captain or the commander is not necessarily condemned by our

mess-deck villagers, who also disapprove obstinately of many of the customs they see permitted, though, like the people of Wapshott-Monachorum and King's-Pridlington, they very wisely keep their thoughts to themselves for the most part.

In some minor matters we are quite open opponents of the legally constituted authorities; instance the case of Petty-officer Quigley, who never troubled to conceal his disdain for doctors, even though they were ornamented with three rows of red and gold lace. The whole science and practice of medicine as authorised by diplomas was, according to Quigley, nothing but a gigantic conspiracy for deceiving the public. He himself placed all his faith in a preparation labelled "Blake's extract," which he considered so far superior to all "doctors' trade" that the matter wasn't worth discussing. Blake's Extract, it seemed, was equally efficacious for external and internal complaints; when rubbed well in with a piece of engine-room waste it was an excellent embrocation and would also cure skin diseases, while for rheumaticy joints it was without an equal. Taken internally it was good for all kinds of pains in the lower-deck, and unrivalled as a preventative against Hunpox—our local name for German measles. Petty-officer Quigley's implicit confidence in the extract led him to think more highly of its powers than even the label claimed—though this was a fairly far-reaching document—and he induced a warrant officer, Gunner Smorfie, to try it for thinness of

hair. Unfortunately, this was beyond the scope of the famous preparation; but the extract, though failing in the desired direction, certainly tried to do *something* to justify its existence; what it did was to clear Mr. Smorfie's head of every single hair still remaining and to stain his scalp a rich walnut colour. The unhappy victim had to be excused Divisions for three days until the colour wore off; since on the first morning at the order "Off caps!" there was such a general and irrepressible titter from the assembled ship's company that the chaplain found it almost impossible to go on with the prayers to be used at sea.

Mr. Smorfie's chagrin at this untoward occurrence was all the greater for that he imagined the incident would in some way interfere with his promotion to mate. For you must understand that there are continual changes in social position going on in our ship—we are always trying to "better ourselves," just as people are in the village ashore. I think that this is not generally understood; people imagine that a ship's company consists of fixed ratings who remain in their same position until the ship is paid off. But in reality there is as much constant change as in a river or a wheat-field; the boy of to-day may be a leading seaman in a couple of years, and in less than that time a leading seaman may be transformed into a wardroom officer.

Mr. Smorfie's promotion came to him in due course; but already he had been nicknamed

“Mr. Brownhead” by the lower-deck, a name which still stuck to him after his elevation to the wardroom; indeed, both he and ourselves became so used to the sound of it that it was an effort to remember which was his real name; and the final *cachet* was placed upon the new surname when our Admiral’s wife—dear inconsequent and simple-minded soul—thinking to put him at his ease, said, “*Do* come and have tea with me one day this week, Mr. Brownhead!”

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## *XVII. Backbone of the Navy*

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**I**F you were to come on board our ship, the very first thing you would notice would probably be the altered values of your old accepted standards. It is as if a German were to leave his Fatherland—as most of them would be only too glad to do at the present time, I expect—and find that his sacred twelve-pfennige mark was only accepted at the value of about sevenpence.

You know, for example, Mr. Stuttaford, in your own parish? He lives in one of those little red-brick houses beyond the bridge; perhaps you are better acquainted with his wife than you are with Mr. Stuttaford himself, since he is only at home on rare occasions. At such times you see him, a staid, respectable gentleman, wearing a short coat with brass buttons, and a peaked cap with a gold badge in front. He is spoken of vaguely in the village as “a naval officer,” and is very much looked up to. Indeed, his family is of some importance and social standing. The eldest daughter teaches in the Sunday school; the red-brick house boasts not only of a gramophone, but also of a piano, and the younger girls practise on

it very assiduously. One of these, moreover, is learning painting from the local art master, and is regarded in the village as something of a prodigy; in fact, the coolness between the Stuttaford family and old Mr. Probus, the people's warden, originated entirely in the latter having referred to the artistic Miss Stuttaford as "the prodigal daughter." It was a well-meant attempt to turn a delicate compliment in keeping with his ecclesiastical office, but Mrs. Stuttaford could never be brought to see that he meant "prodigy" all the time.

Enough, however, on the position of Mr. Stuttaford in his native home; you really know this better than I do. It is of his position on board ship that I wish to write.

Let us watch him, first, at admiral's inspection—a function which takes place at indefinite intervals when we cannot manage to prevent it any longer. There are many other details of various natures—sad, humorous, and purely frightful—connected with this inspection, which need not be mentioned now. The scene in which I would present Mr. Stuttaford to you is on the quarter-deck.

Here, behind the shelter of a small table, stands the admiral in full panoply of frock-coat and sword, and surrounded by a sort of guard of honour composed of the flag-captain, the commander, the fleet paymaster, and last, but by no means least, the master-at-arms.

On the deck, in front of the table, is inscribed in white chalk a circle of about two feet in diameter.



All "the hands" are marshalled in ranks by hundreds—like Anglo-Saxons—and foremost amongst the ranks of the chief petty officers stands Mr. Stuttaford. (Fancy calling him "a hand" ! ) He steps forward from the ranks in his turn, advances till he stands exactly in the chalked circle, where he salutes smartly and announces that he is Thomas Jonathan Stuttaford, chief bos'n's mate, G.I., three badges. And later in the day you may very likely hear our boatswain, Mr. Goble, sending the messenger-boy to "tell Stuttaford I want him at once." You begin now to think that the bottom of the world is falling out ! *You* would never have dared to say anything but "Mister" to him. Yet here it is just plain Stuttaford, and the summons could hardly be more peremptory, "tell him I want him at once ! "

Wonderful to relate, Stuttaford actually obeys ; and, what is more, he is a patient listener while the boatswain talks roundly to him in language anything but complimentary, ending by the remark that he is a proper ullage, and has made a pot-mess of the whole show.

But, bless you, if you were to stay a little longer with us you would get to know that Mr. Goble himself has occasionally to endure just such another tirade—he calls it a "strafig" nowadays—from Lieutenant Jones, who in turn gets it from Commander Brown, who has *his* rub-down from Captain Smith, who is hauled over the coals by Rear-Admiral Robinson, who finally catches

it from Admiral Sir Browne Robinson Smythe-Johnnes.

And you would most likely go back to your quiet-home on shore feeling that, in spite of all the topsyturvydom of the Navy your early impressions were, after all, correct, and that Mr. Stuttaford is really a representative of a class that is the backbone of the Navy—a staid, reliable, upright man, invaluable as an example to the youngsters, and able to preserve his own proper dignity upon proper occasions and to drop it when need be; which is a matter that shore-goers are not, as a rule, quite so quick to learn.

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### XVIII. *The Story of Job*

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FROM the highest to the lowest of us we are all in the same boat; not merely literally—though we should call this a *ship*, not a *boat*—but also in the metaphorical sense. From the admiral down to the dusty boy—whose more high-sounding official title is ship's steward's assistant—we all suffer identical inconveniences, the unavoidable accompaniments of the naval service. I need not dwell on the unpleasant fact that even the highest rank does not confer immunity to *mal de mer*; sufficient for present purposes to emphasise the fact that we all get exactly the same amount of leave.

The ship was favoured by the Olympians with the rare gift of a whole week's leave not very long ago. And in the special train that raced merrily westwards sat the admiral in a reserved first-class compartment, as happy as a boy let loose from school; also, in a third-class carriage in the after-part of the train, along with nine of his mess-mates, sat Job Rossiter, O.D. (which, though you would hardly guess it, stands for ordinary seaman). Job was performing the extremely difficult feat of playing "Keep the home fires

burning!" on the mouth-organ while his cheeks were crammed full with ham sandwich. He had been rated only the previous day, having then reached the age of eighteen years, and he was going "On Leaf." So he, too, was happy—as happy as the admiral.

Now, it happened that Job Rossiter, O.D. and the admiral were inhabitants of the same village; the admiral being, in private life, the squire of the place. And at the big house there lived a pretty tweeny-maid, named Emmeline Pettigrew, with whom our Job became acquainted during his brief leave, and so great was the mutual attraction that he even went to the length of walking out with her on two occasions.

Then came the sad return from such pleasant dalliance, and the postal officials had one more pair of correspondents to add to their labours.

"Do you know I have taken quite a liking to you," wrote Job, in a moment of effusiveness. He was a cautious lad by nature. He then proceeded with the more prosaic statement that he would like a "parcle" from time to time, and suggested an exchange of "pothoes," which are not, as you might perhaps think, gardening tools, but merely counterfeit presentments of the absent object of affection.

Emmeline Pettigrew, however, while as modest as she was pretty, belonged to that resourceful class of people who think the world will go round all the better if you give it a push. Who says

that woman has no part in love-making? In her reply letter she suggested that she and Job should become engaged.

This was taking matters too much at the rush for our shy and cautious Job. "I think we are both of us much too young for that sort of thing," wrote back the judicious youth.

Then all the trouble started! After a fortnight's silence Emmeline wrote to say that she was going with a sergeant home on leave from the Front, and that he was very anxious for her to become engaged to him.

Do you know, I even have a tiny doubt whether there really *was* a sergeant at all! Such is the depravity of the female heart that—well, well, perhaps I may be wrong, after all.

Job, though, entertained no doubts on the subject, and naturally—you know what men are—the great over-mastering desire of his life from that moment was to become affianced to Emmeline.

He wrote and said so. But she, from some motive which I shall not attempt to analyse, would have none of him.

Sudden downfall of Job. He was adrift from his watch three times in one week. He disobeyed the orders of his petty officer. He had to muster his bag on account of glaring deficiencies in his kit. He was insolent to the officer of the watch when taken before him to answer for his misdeeds. In short, he took a headlong plunge down the road to ruin.

Commander's report ; captain's report. Number Ten punishment. Cells. More cells. Even the captain, wise man as he was, could make nothing of him.

Up before the captain again ; and this time Job, apparently on the point of bursting into tears, requested to be allowed to see the admiral.

An unusual request, indeed ! But then you don't know our admiral. The interview was granted, and what took place at it I can only guess.

I rather fancy that the admiral's wife was told off for a job—the job of bringing young Emmeline to her bearings.

At any rate, I gather that the affair took a satisfactory turn. Job is all smiles these days. "The admiral has ackshally promised to let us be married from his house," he told me, "and to give Emmeline away himself as soon as I get rated leading seaman !"

Job is once more the smartest fellow in his division, and looks forward to being rated A.B. before the year is out.

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## *XIX. The Clean Up.*

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OUR floating village has its periodical clean-up, much in the same way as its parallel community ashore; only in our case it comes, perhaps, a little more frequently, and we *do* put into practice the old adage—

If each before his own door swept  
The village would be clean.

We do it because we have to. And, of course, we get to like it in time. Life in a crowded man-of-war would quickly become intolerable unless all dirt were rigorously excluded. Indeed, we go rather to extremes, and give to the word "dirt" its strictest interpretation as "matter in the wrong place."

To illustrate this, I need only quote the case of a regular old sea-dog of a captain, who was once in command of a smart ship, a man of splendid seamanlike qualities, but also of uncertain temper. There was, in those days, an evolution—that is to say, a drill known as "prepare for battle," according to which the most meticulous preparations had to be made. Splinter-nets were rigged on the upper deck, tallies inscribed "to be thrown over-

board " or " to be sent ashore," had to be tied to every article unnecessary for use in action—and, in short, so many different operations had to be carried out that two whole days were officially allowed for the preparation.

Knowing his captain's sensitiveness—not to say irritability—the commander took extra pains over the job, and when he had made everything ready reported to the captain: "Ship ready for inspection, sir."

The captain appeared on deck, and went round the ship, looking into every hole and corner, above and below, "but never a word spake he!"

After spending about two hours in this silent review, he turned finally to the commander and barked out: "When you're properly prepared for battle I'll inspect the ship!"—and disappeared once more into his cabin.

The unhappy executive officer then spent three nerve-racking days trying to discover what was wrong. He asked all the other officers, but nobody could discover any signs of omission or commission till finally a horny old quartermaster suggested that perhaps the trouble might be centred in a loose end of rope that had become detached from a splinter-net and was lying on the deck below it.

In despair at finding any other cause for complaint, the commander once more reported "Ship ready for inspection, sir," with much fear and trembling.

Again the captain went his silent rounds; and



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## *The Clean Up*

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after as long a time as before he turned to his commander, and this time said briefly, "Carry on!"

It *was* just this loose rope's-end, then, that had been the cause of his former disapproval!

But one rope's-end lying about would probably lead to others; and not rope's-ends alone, but all sorts of other things would follow suit; so the crusty captain was perhaps not altogether in the wrong!

Our speciality, however, in the cleaning line is scrubbing! You probably know that the sailor's wife keeps her floors whiter than any one else in the village, especially when her husband is home on leave; that is because *he* does the scrubbing! He is so used to it, you see, and can't abide to have his decks at home looking any less white and spotless than those of his ship.

Then, in addition, we always have an extra special clean-up for Sundays. In fact, in some ships we start doing this on Friday, and it lasts right up to just before Divisions on Sunday morning.

Once upon a time there was a dirty sailor. There couldn't have been more than one, so I won't tell you his name, but just designate him as Bill Buggins. He wouldn't wash himself, he wouldn't keep his clothes clean, and, worst of all, the part of the ship he was required to look after was—well, really!

Reproofs and minor punishments had no effect

whatever upon him. "Buggins," said the captain, "you're a disgrace to the ship!" But did Bill care for this? Not he! "Seven days 10.A.," said the commander, and said it several times; but Bill Buggins seemed to really like doing 10.A.

At last Bill's own mess took the matter up—with the P.O. at their head. "Bill," they said, "we don't blame you, we pities you; you're a pore, onfortunate creature wot has never been larned proper, that's wot *you* are! Now, we're going to give 'ee the eddication you've missed in your young days! A hounce of hexample is worth a pound of pretences, so 'tis said; and we're goin' to let 'ee have double allowance—*two* ounces of best yellow soap, some good, fine scouring sand, and a nice bit o' canvas to put it on with!"

The unhappy Bill was thereupon treated to a right down thorough good cleaning, first with his clothes on, and later, as these suffered somewhat in the process, on his vile body! He spluttered and fought, but it was all no good. Cleaned he had to be, and cleaned he was!

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## XX. *Grand Fleet Interludes*

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### 1. *The Gardeners.*

NO; I must not say exactly where the garden was situated; for the Censorship forms a hedge much more efficient than the one which surrounds the garden itself, since there is no breaking through the Censorship, whereas in the case of the garden-hedge those piratical Destroyer fellows—but wait a bit, I will come to that presently.

There can be no harm, at any rate, in saying that the garden was on an island, and that the island lies “somewhere in the North Sea.”

The island had never boasted of a garden before, in all the million odd years of its existence; all the energies of its soil had aimed at nothing more ambitious than a few tired oats and half-hearted potatoes; and if an island has any sentiment at all, it must have been a tremendous surprise for it to find a portion of its surface transformed into a garden; something like a young thing who has been in the back row of the chorus for forty years would feel if suddenly picked to play leading lady.

The whole idea emanated from the Rear-Admiral Commanding the Seventh Sub-division of the Nineteenth Battle Squadron—hereinafter called the Admiral, for short. A fancy picture in the *Lustige Blatter*—yes, we do see the Hun papers occasionally—in which a British battleship was depicted as tied up alongside a wall and dressed with window-boxes and other garden-stuff, to make the easily-gulled Deutschers believe that our ships behave just as theirs actually do behave—(you can commence this thrilling serial sentence here)—inspired him with the notion.

“What-Ho!” (or words to that effect) said the Admiral, “not a bad idea at all! Let’s have a garden.”

“Why not?” said the Flag-Captain.

“I’m all for it,” said the Commander.

“Ripping idea,” said the First-Lieutenant.

“—” said the Watch-keepers, in the sheltered seclusion of the wardroom, knowing full well that they would be lurked for the digging. And so they were. They made an honest endeavour to drag the doctors, paymasters, engineers, and the chaplain into it; pointing out that gardening was ripping sport and top-hole exercise, and the finest way of spending an afternoon that was ever invented. One would have thought, to hear them talk, that only an unkind fate had prevented them from being professional gardeners and had turned them into naval officers just out of spite.

But the others were not so easily persuaded.

"No," they said; "we don't *need* the exercise; our muscles are formed; we won't deprive you of any of the joys of gardening."

And because the garden was originated by the Olympians it was named the Garden of Allah; but because of the various excuses to which it gave rise on wet afternoons or fine afternoons, when the weather was either too beastly or too glorious to go gardening, it was also named the Garden of Lies.

The first step was to buy about a bushelful of books on gardening, of which the one that seemed the popular favourite was a book called *The Back Garden Beautiful*—though why the author couldn't call it "*The Beautiful Back Garden*" is more than I can say. Also it seemed a little inappropriate here, for this garden of ours was scarcely a back garden, except in the sense that it lay at the Back o' Beyond.

The Admiral also procured a quantity of Seeds-men's Catalogues—about enough to fill the stern sheets of the cutter—and gloated loquaciously over the magnificent illustrations of flowers therein depicted, flowers of such size and beauty as are never seen anywhere else but in—a Seedsman's Catalogue.

Vast quantities of seeds also arrived in due course. Everybody had a hand in the choosing of them, and each man was allowed to pick what he liked. For it was understood that this garden was to be none of your conventional, hide-bound affairs;

it had to grow what was piped for it to grow, not what it wanted itself.

The Admiral was all for vegetable produce, and put in seeds of practically every sort of eatable plant that grows.

The Commander—who was of a poetic and artistic temperament—wanted sweet peas and nothing else.

“All right,” said the Admiral; “plenty of room! Put ’em in amongst the potatoes, then you won’t need pea-sticks—they can hang on to the potato-stalks.”

The same principle decided that violets should be grown with the turnips, the broad leaves of the latter providing a kindly shade for the modest flowers.

Another enthusiast had a passion for orchids. It was pointed out to him that these required a glass house and various other aids and contrivances, but he was not to be deterred. “Let ’em get acclimatised, same as I’ve had to,” he said. “If I can stick it, I don’t see why they shouldn’t; once they see they’re not going to be caudled and pampered they’ll grow fast enough, you see!”

We had pansies and cabbages in one corner, roses and tomatoes in another, and a border of primulas around an asparagus bed. In fact, most of the garden was apportioned in the same way as the football grounds are; that is to say, four or five different kinds of seeds were thrown in together, each to have the use of the ground at

successive intervals. And in some cases where it was afterwards discovered that two kinds of seeds were due to come up the same month, a like principle still held good as when two matches are arranged by mistake to take place on the same ground at the same time; the teams with the stronger men occupy the field.

The fact of the ship being at sea so frequently caused great interference with regular gardening work. There were weeks and weeks when nothing was done. The Admiral was rather worried over this, but his patriotism was even greater than his gardening enthusiasm and he was content to let the garden take its chance.

Perhaps this was really the cause of the success—Nature being allowed to have her own way without interference; or else it may have been due to the proverbial luck that waits on the British Navy. But the fact remains that most of the things really did grow! Tulips and early spring cabbages came up side by side in splendid luxuriance; magnificent dahlias fraternised with exuberant horse-radishes; grand specimens of ramblers roses hob-nobbed with scarlet-runners.

Just a little too soon to gather in the earliest first-fruits, we were once more ordered to sea; but we all looked forward greedily to having our tables loaded with produce on our return—the Admiral especially.

But, alas! A destroyer flotilla—rightly named—put in during our absence; a long regimen of bare

Navy food had rendered them more than usually piratical; they came, they saw, they stripped the garden of every blessed thing, and they departed again !

The words we used on our return were longer than any to be found in the Seedsmen's Catalogues. It was the only way to relieve our feelings, so we said everything we could think of—the Admiral especially !



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## 2. *Our Revue.*

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“**I** CALL it a top-hole show,” said the Commander, as we came back from the *Inimitable*’s theatricals,—“about the best I’ve seen; and those snotties made a ripping beauty-chorus !”

“Too dashed life-like,” sighed our Sentimentalist,—“when one hasn’t seen a bit of skirt for ten months it doesn’t seem fair to dangle the imitation article before one’s eyes like that !”

“The singing wasn’t too good,” complained our Musician; “the enunciation was distinctly poor, and in some passages the tenor was quite perceptibly a half a semitone sharp !”

“What I didn’t care about was the lack of a connected plot,” urged our Literary Man. “After all, the play’s the thing, and this was a mere stringing together of songs and patter !”

“Anyhow,” said our Bon Vivreur cheerily, “they did put up a very good show in the refreshment line; those foie-gras sandwiches were just it,—I had fourteen of ’em; and their meringues were jolly good, too.”

Undeterred by all these criticisms, the Commander proceeded to launch the suggestion which

had evidently been in his mind from the moment he left the *Inimitable* and stepped into our boat. "I think it's up to us to put up a show of our own now," said he, "and try to knock the *Inimitables* out, if we can!"

Dissentient voices—there were several of these—were silenced by a majority of approving supporters of the scheme. But a little difficulty arose at the beginning with respect to the form which our entertainment should take.

"Don't let's be mere slavish imitators of other ships," urged our Musician. "Can't we have something entirely different? I would suggest a sort of chamber concert of classical music, two or three quartettes, a 'cello solo or two, and, say, three or four pieces for violin and piano."

"Frightfully thrilling," sneered the first of many objectors to this proposal. "How the lower deck would enjoy it. I can see every piece being encored twice over!"

"There wouldn't be time for encores, I'm afraid," answered the musical enthusiast; and it remains unsolved to this day whether the sarcasm was wasted on him or whether he was doing a bit of quiet leg-pulling himself.

"I should like to have a proper play," suggested our Literary Man,—“something of Shakespeare's for preference: *Henry the Eighth*, for instance, or *Titus Andronicus*; we ought to try and elevate the taste of the Fleet somewhat!"

"Elevate my foot!" blurted our Vulgarian.

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## Grand Fleet Interludes

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“If we must have a play, why not do one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s?”

This idea found several supporters, until the fact came to light that the only member of the mess with a face and voice suited to the heroine’s part was also possessed of a beard which he refused to shave; and it was considered that none of Gilbert and Sullivan’s heroines would look really well with a beard.

Of course, in the long run, the decision finally drifted into the same channel as that of every other ship, and we arranged to have a revue.

The Junior Watchkeeper volunteered to write the libretto, putting forward as his credentials that he had contributed several articles on Dry-Fly Fishing to the *Field*, and had taken part in a French play when he was at a preparatory school. Being, therefore, both literary and dramatic, he felt himself doubly qualified for the part.

For a whole fortnight he spent most of his time shut up in his cabin, and in order to be able to devote himself solely to play-writing worked upon the Commander to get himself excused all watch-keeping. Looking backward now, one is inclined to suspect that this was his true motive, rather than the pursuit of art for art’s sake.

At the end of this time he emerged, with a bulky manuscript entitled “Round the Fleet for Sixpence: or Jack and the Hun-Stalk,”—all written in verse, after the approved pantomime model.

Unfortunately, the whole thing proved to be a

tissue of scurrilous witticisms directed against not only every one in the ship but everybody in every other ship of the Fleet as well, not sparing the most exalted ranks and caring nothing for stripes or aiguelettes !

Phew ! It was very funny,—that cannot be denied. But, to produce it in public would have black-listed the ship for ever and a day—would have jammed the promotion of every one in her from the skipper downwards, and would probably have resulted in the miserable librettist being put on the beach straight away ! It is a pity that extracts cannot be given here ; they might add to the gaiety of nations, but I might be held responsible for them !

Of course, it was obvious that “the book” must be suppressed ; but our Literary Man volunteered to amend it, taking out all the personalities and recasting the whole thing.

It became, in his hands, “Jack and Jell-icoe : a Phantasy”—written in the Shakespearean style with classical tags and erudite allusions which nobody understood. The author gave a private reading in the wardroom to our Committee of Selection, but before he had got through the first act every member of the committee was fast asleep !

We all insisted on having a hand in it after this. “Make it a detective yarn,” suggested one man. “Something after the style of a movies drama,” pleaded another. “No ; a farce of the *Charlie’s Aunt* kind,” said a third. “With a

stirring love-interest," said a fourth. "Why have a plot at all?" asked a fifth; "nobody cares a hang about the story of the thing—all you want is plenty of songs and good dresses, and above all, something rigged up to look like girls!"

We all felt convinced that this speaker had spoken words of true wisdom.

"We must have some scenery," we were reminded by our artist; and he and the ship's painter collaborated to produce the necessary back-cloths and side-scenes.

Unhappily, the painter took offence at an early date, the customary quarrel between the professional and the amateur being the immediate cause, and our artist was left to do the job, single-handed. And as he was unable to paint anything but scenes of a rural and pastoral nature, the result left a good deal to the imagination. For example, Scene 1 was described on the programme as "Victoria Station at Midnight," but the back-scene was a pleasing sunlit picture of green fields with a babbling brook and a windmill. Scene 2, described as "The Robbers' Cave," appeared to the eye as a poppy-strewn cornfield; and so it was with all the rest of the scenes. But we all felt it was a pity to waste such well-painted cloths. Besides, we had no others, and one surely need not be too particular about the dramatic unities in a revue!

After innumerable rehearsals the thing was at last produced. It was a screaming success. And

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*Grand Fleet Days*

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—would you believe it?—I overheard the commander of another ship saying to his brother officers as they stepped into their boat, “I call it a top-hole show, about the best I’ve seen! And those snotties made a ripping beauty-chorus!” And an answering voice came faintly back across the water, “Too dashed life-like——!” We are all of us very much alike—in our thoughts and opinions, as well as in our attempts at the Drama!

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### 3. *The Sailing Regatta.*

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“**W**HAT an incessant whirl of gaiety we do live in, to be sure !” exclaimed our cynical torpedo-lieutenant, as he flung down upon the wardroom table a half-foolscap sheet of print. “First we have steam-tactics, then coal-ship, ammunition and provision ship, shift billet twice in a forenoon, proceed out of harbour, come into harbour, shift billet again, coal ship once more, and now, to stop up everything, I’m blest if we’re not let in for a Squadron Sailing Regatta !”

It will be observed that our torpedo-lieutenant is not really a keen enthusiast about boat-sailing. Golf is his forte, and after golf—or perhaps one should say “With but after”—come his beloved mouldies, over which he spends hours down in the torpedo flat, lovingly caressing them and entering their pedigrees in his stud book, and all that sort of thing; hoping one day to launch them against the Hun, and by so doing not only win honour and glory, but, more important still, prove how vastly superior the torpedo-branch of the Service is to that of mere gunnery.

The derision with which he made his announcement concerning the regatta did not, however,

meet with any sympathy; much to his surprise, everybody seemed to be pleased about it.

After all, you can never tell what will please people. Our P.M.O. the other day had to send a very junior midshipman to the hospital ship to be operated on for appendicitis; he composed a letter to the boy's mother, and spent several anxious hours in endeavouring so to word his epistle that he might break the news to an anxious parent, and calm her natural fears as much as possible. In a few days he got an answer back, which ran, "Dear Dr.—, —I am delighted to hear that Bertie is having that annoying portion of his inside removed; appies have always been a trouble in our family, and I always say that the sooner they are tweaked out the better."

In point of fact, quite a thrill of pleasure passed around the wardroom when we heard that we were to have a squadron sailing regatta. One cannot always be Hun-hunting; and in the long intervals when lying at anchor at—hush!—or when steaming in a—hush again!—direction, any sort of amusement is good enough to break the monotony; you can see, these days, two bearded officers getting quite excited over a game of Halma, and if any one sends us a new jig-saw we get quite giddy with frivolity!

Besides, there are those amongst us who are frightfully keen on sailing races, even in normal times. One such is our young Irish doctor, known



generally as Pat Murphy, although his real name is Habakkuk Potts; which has not got altogether an Irish ring about it, though the owner of it says it is a very ancient Erse name and should really be spelt Aghduhba'ecchead Moihgbd's—I hope I have got this down correctly, but cannot guarantee its exact accuracy.

Anyhow, Pat Murphy fancies himself as a bit of a boat sailer. Principally because, once upon a time, before the war, he took away the skiff under sail, when we were at Lamlash, with the intention of landing on Holy Island; he came back in tow of the picket-boat, having fetched up on the coast some four miles below Ardrossan, and all we could get out of him was that he had changed his mind, and that he thought a longer sail would be a foine divarsion; but, of course, nobody believed him.

So now he was all over it—to use the crisp, clearcut idiom of our graceful language—and professed himself ready and eager to take away any boat from the launch downwards. He said he would like to show some of us fellows what good boat-sailing really was; and told us that it was not every one that knew how to handle a boat; it was not a thing ye could learn—ye had to be naturalee gifted for ut.

Our Hedonist pooh-poohed the whole idea. “Nobody cares tuppence about the boats in a regatta,” he said; “the main thing is to get a

lot of skirt off from the beach, have flags and rugs and armchairs and palms and things all over the quarter-deck, the band playing, sun shining, and a dance to wind up with!"

"Yes," interrupted our Gourmand, "and a slap-up tea, lots of it! I remember when I was in the old ——." Here he wandered off into enraptured reminiscences, in which iced-chocolate-cakes, champagne-cup, and foie-gras sandwiches played the principal parts; and nobody paid any further attention to him.

It was decided, after a good deal of heated discussion, that Pat Murphy should be permitted to go away in the second cutter with a lieutenant in charge of the boat, the lieutenant being told to let Pat Murphy believe himself to be in charge, but on no account to let him give any orders or do anything on his own. The commander said he would take the gig, the first lieutenant took the Montague whaler, and the other boats of the ship were apportioned to various officers.

On the mess-deck there was even more interest shown about the regatta than there was aft.

Private Nobby Clark R.M.L.I., coxswain of the Marines' whaler's crew and a star-turn man at sailing a boat, met Gunner Dusty Miller, of our chummy ship, H.M.S. *Monstrous*, while on shore one day when leave was piped to liberty-men from two till six; and after a slight discussion with him touching the question whether the beer-tickets

for the day were puce or cerise, went on to debate the merits of their respective boats; and as Gunner Miller was two stone heavier than Private Clark, the latter returned on board us with a dislocated jaw and both eyes rendered useless for practical purposes for some days, though considered as a tone-harmony their colour scheme was a brilliant success.

But any idea of his going away as coxswain was out of the question; and the only satisfaction was that Gunner Miller was also incapacitated. As it turned out, our Marines' crew won, owing to the *Monstrous's* whaler fouling the buoy at the turn, and Private Clark held quite a levée in the sick-bay with his jubilant messmates.

The day of the regatta dawned, wet and blowing hard. It always is like that on a regatta day. Even abroad, where climate is more settled and warm, fine weather is a matter of routine, the one infallible method of getting a cold, stormy day is to get up a regatta. But in home waters the only sensible thing would be to hold the regatta in the middle of January, when the day would probably turn out hot with light airs out of sheer perversity.

So it was postponed until the following day. This also is a matter of routine. Moreover, still according to routine, the following day proved to be slightly worse, if anything; but it was decided to risk matters and not make any further postponement.

Well, our ship managed to do fairly successfully. We won the squadron cup for racing cutters under service rig, presented some years ago by his Royal Highness the Sultan of Kahat when he concluded his service as midshipman in the British Navy, and before he retired to his Central African kingdom and introduced golf with his twenty-five wives to caddy for him.

The cup was a magnificent affair, standing two feet high and adorned with all manner of intricate work, and the winning of such a splendid trophy gave great delight to the whole ship's company—with the exception of the Marine silver-man in the pantry, who observed with disgust: "Another blighted piece of bright-work for me to clean, two hours' work a day at the least, and all for ten bob a month!" But nobody sympathised with him in his troubles.

In other races, too, we did quite well. But I will not attempt to labour any description of them, confining my efforts in this direction to the all-comers' race, which came at the end of the programme.

Of course, as everybody knows, the great art in a sailing-race is to cross the line a few seconds before the gun fires without being found out. To do this successfully is not by any means a simple matter. You have to make it appear that in spite of your utmost efforts to get exactly on the starting-line at the right moment you are unavoidably

carried beyond it. So you must approach it just too soon, go about, try again, do this twice, and be apparently just going to go about again when the gun fires, and with a certain amount of luck you may bring it off.

Of course we never do anything like that in our ship! We would scorn it! Besides, it is rather risky. So all our boats got away right at the proper moment, and, being skilfully handled, got well ahead of the others in every class. The wind was by this time very tricky, inclined to be gusty, and showing signs of falling. Of course, it fell entirely just when the launches were furthest away from the ships, and a launch being a boat that will not sail in a light wind, they all had to be towed home.

In the cutters' class there was more excitement. Especially in the one which was officered by Pat Murphy and the lieutenant. During a sudden hard gust of wind the latter gave the order to ease the main sheet, and Pat, who was holding on to it, immediately hauled it aft as far as it would come. With the result that the boat capsized and the occupants spent a damp and uncomfortable hour sitting on the bottom of the upturned cutter, Pat Murphy explaining with much volubility the cause of the mishap; "I thought ye said heave," he said.

The commander, in the gig, came home an easy first and turned his attention to directing the

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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picket-boats to go away at once; the first picket-boat to tow the launch back to the ship and the second one to go and pick up the cutter.

We are looking forward now to the Pulling Regatta. It it provides as much incident as the sailing one it will be a pleasing break in the sameness of our routine existence:

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#### 4. *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*

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THIS title has already been used before by another great writer. I am sorry about this, but it can't be helped. No other title would do quite so well for the present veracious history; because—to give reasons in writing:—(1) It is all about a Flat. For the information of such as may be unaware of the fact, a Flat in a ship of war is a compartment below decks which may be, as in this case, an open space surrounded by officers' cabins. (2) The Flat in question was known by the name of Poker Flat—though it was also designated Virtue Villas—on account of its occupants being extremely partial to a certain game of chance. (3) The said occupants became Outcasts from their fellows, for reasons which shall be hereinafter mentioned.

So, taking everything into consideration, what other title could I have chosen?

The ship (or vessel) to which I am now referring was the old unarmoured cruiser *Baltic*, considered in her day the pride of the ocean, but now employed as mother-ship for toboggans in the South Pacific, and manned by a crowd who languished in vain longings after a more exciting and active life.

Very quiet and restful indeed it was on board the old *Baltic*; and had it not been for the toboggan fellows who used to come into the mess of an evening and cheer things up a little, it would have been intolerably dull. They did introduce a little "liveliness," however; too much of it, perhaps!

The crew found it pretty dull forrard, too. In spite of the efforts of the Physical Training Expert, who lay awake at nights thinking out new acrobatic contortions to inflict on the men and keep them for a long time on their feet, they had, instead, a lot of time on their hands. Consequently they began to get into mischief, and I regret to say that they began to take to gambling; which is most strictly forbidden on board ship.

The Commander was very worried about this, the more so as he was well aware that certain of the junior wardroom officers were setting the example in this respect.

"Not in the wardroom, of course," he said; "I shouldn't let it go on there. But—well, you know—down in Poker Flat; there's a dashed sight too much of it! I shouldn't mind if it were just a little flutter now and then; but it's getting a regular nightly affair now, and those toboggan officers drift in here as if the ship were a regular casino! I can't take any notice of what goes on in officers' cabins, naturally. What am I to do?"

The individual to whom the Commander addressed his plaint was the *Baltic's* Temporary Chaplain for the Period of Hostilities, the Rev.



Nunmore Meek, a pale, insipid-looking gentleman who hailed from the sweet seclusion of a Shropshire country parish; one of the very last people you would suspect of joining one of the fighting forces, if you hadn't become accustomed to seeing all sorts of equally unlikely people doing the same thing!

"Indeed, I wish I could help you to stop this horrid vice," replied the mild Padre; "but I am afraid my influence over them is very small, oh, very small!"

However, he did what in him lay, and came out next Sunday with a most trenchant sermon on Betting and Gambling, with illustrative allusions from the ancient Fathers in the original Greek and Latin; on which the Mess-Deck verdict was: "Our minister be a vurry larned man; w'y, not even the orfcers can unnerstan' a single word 'e du say!" And great was the respect he thus earned for himself; but the effect upon the regrettable practice of gambling was, as might have been expected, nil.

Amongst the junior wardroom officers there were even to be found open scoffers. "What rot you talked, Padre," they calmly observed. "Why, how can you tell whether a thing is good or bad when you've never tried it? Come and watch us one night, and you'll see there's very little harm in it after all!"

The Reverend Nunmore Meek was nothing if not just, and acknowledged the reasonableness of

this proposal. And—to cut a long story short—found himself one evening in one of the cabins of Poker Flat amidst a small crowd of Baltics and tobogganists, engaged in what they described as a little game of chance.

“I cannot think it is free from the censure of being most reprehensible,” he remarked, after watching a few rounds. “Why, it is even permissible to cheat and lie!”

“You bet your sweet life, Padre,” was the vulgar reply; “the most accomplished liar wins at this game!”

“Yet I cannot help thinking that it might be played with strict honesty and honour,” insisted the mild cleric, “and would then make quite an agreeable parlour-game.”

“You try it on those lines,” jeered the others. “You’re just the sort of lamb we should like to play with! Poker’s a cheating game, and all’s fair unless it’s found out. Perhaps you would like to take a hand?”

Thus challenged, Mr. Meek was put upon his mettle, and sat down with the players.

“I think I understand the rules from watching you,” he said; “they appear to be simple.”

Simple they may have been, but the Reverend Nunmore Meek was simpler still if he thought that he would have any success. At the end of half an hour he had lost a couple of pounds. Yet he showed no inclination to stop.

He betted every time on hands which were

really beyond description. Once, for example, a hand on which he lost heavily consisted of a pair of nines. "But all the other cards are red ones," he exclaimed plaintively; "doesn't that count something? Didn't you tell me that was a flush, or am I mistaken?"

They told him he was mistaken; and, being decent fellows, begged him not to play any more. But the parson's blood was up and nothing would stop him. Finally, when there was the largest pool of the evening, he insisted on staying in when every one else was shy except Lieutenant Deuceace, the leading hand of the *Baltic's* poker-players.

"Am I allowed to increase my wager?" asked Mr. Meek.

He was allowed to; still, Deuceace outbid him. Mr. Meek again "increased his wager," so did Deuceace.

At the end of ten minutes the betting amounted to the appalling sum of two hundred pounds—an amount unheard of in all the annals of naval card-playing, which after all is generally fairly innocuous.

Deuceace gave in at this point. He had nothing but his bare pay—unless you count his card-winnings!

He laid down four aces and a joker. "What does mine count?" asked Mr. Meek, with an innocent smile, as he exposed—a royal flush.

The Reverend Nunmore Meek sent his com-

pliments to Mr. Deuceace next morning, and could the latter spare him a few minutes in his cabin.

“Deuceace, my boy,” he said, as he slowly tore in pieces an I O U and shredded it into his waste-paper basket, “it may interest you to know that before I was ordained I spent ten years in Arizona, where I regret to say I was generally known by the name of Hellfire Jack. You fellows don’t know the first thing about poker-play! All I ask now, in return for my tearing up this little note of yours, is that you will discourage gambling on the mess-deck—and amongst the junior officers of this ship!”

The toboggan fellows go elsewhere now when they want a little flutter; the Baltics never touch a card, and consequently are treated very coldly by their erstwhile fellow-players; in fact, they are complete Outcasts. And on the *Baltic’s* mess-deck the favourite game nowadays is spillikins.

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## 5. *Lecturing*

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THE idea emanated from the Captain, who said that it ought really to be done in every ship; when he was a lieutenant in the old *Incomparable* they used to make a constant practice of it, and it had proved a tremendous success; what was more, we ought in these days to seize every opportunity for the advancement of progress and to cultivate intellectual pursuits as much as possible; it would be a very good thing if we would only imitate the Germans a little in their habit of taking life seriously and absorbing every new idea as it came out;—and so on. He held the floor for a solid half-hour in this strain, and we all listened with the most profound respect.

His idea was, roughly, that every wardroom officer in turn should give a lecture to the rest of the officers, the subject to be left entirely to his own individual choice, and the lecture to be followed by a discussion. It was not stated whether the gun-room and warrant officers were to be brought into the scheme as active participants, but we gathered that they were just to attend as silent sufferers; not a bad idea, that, because gun-room officers, at

any rate, could have their leave stopped if they failed to applaud the speaker, or if they asked awkward questions during the discussion; and the younger ones could be beaten.

I cannot say that the suggestion was received with any great degree of acclamation. You see, the evening can be spent so profitably otherwise; as, for instance, in wooing gentle slumber on the settees, or in those various indoor games which have Made England What She Is.

However, there were two officers who seized upon the idea with avidity.

One of these was the Gunnery-Lieutenant, who foresaw an opening for inflicting on his helpless messmates all the dread ideas surging through his brain; inoculating them with his own virus, so to speak, having got them into a position where they would be powerless to resist or retaliate.

"I shan't be able to do it in one lecture," he said, with the froth of anticipatory joy streaming from his fervent lips; "it will take me at least six lectures to go through the elementary part, and then, if you catch on to it at all, I wouldn't mind giving a further course of another half a dozen just to go a little more into detail."

We thanked him, but declined his offer. We made it very plain indeed, in order not to leave any doubts in his mind that it was only our modesty which prevented us from accepting; because he is that sort of fellow,—he would rather spend a whole forenoon any day in range-finding

exercises than have his pay raised, and he fancies that every one else must be built the same way.

The majority, though unwilling to become lecturers themselves, were very forward with suggestions for others, the suggestions being mostly of a facetious nature. Collected in one list, the programme as thus proposed would have run somewhat after this fashion :—

Our Amorist : “ Hearts I have broken.”

The Junior Engineer-Lieutenant : “ Remarks (super-heated) on motor-launches ; with hints on taking them in tow.”

The Senior Watchkeeper : “ Work, and how to dodge it.”

Our Pessimist : “ What will become of England ? ”

Well, the list was longer really, but I won't pain you with any more of it.

Some of the junior officers, feeling that they would be bound to be made the scapegoats and would be told off by the Commander to open the course, resigned themselves to their fate, seeking relief only by cutting who should be the first to get up and make an ass of himself, as their quaint wording had it. But a slight altercation, following on the discovery that one of the contestants had a series of cutting-words arranged to meet every contingency, led to a breakdown in this agreement, and the unwilling aspirants for oratorical honours left their fate to chance with the gloomiest forebodings.

I mentioned that there was, however, another

one in addition to the Gunnery-Lieutenant who was quite eager to become a lecturer. This was our Temporary Assistant-Paymaster, who had joined for the period of hostilities, a very fierce, warlike person, who somehow managed to convey the idea that his great delight was to wade in gore and crush Prussian Militarism. He was, indeed, the very dickens of a piratical cut-throat, one of the old Buccaneering breed. Joining the Navy was no joke to him—he took it tremendously seriously. One of the first things he did on joining was to get his chest and arms tattooed all over by the ship's cook; but the process apparently had some flaw in it, for the designs never came to anything more than a thick and angry rash, which kept our warrior confined to his bed for a week.

In private life our Temporary Assistant-Paymaster was a Professor of Geology at a well-known college; and in appearance he was a little sandy-haired fellow of thirty-five or so, with gold-rimmed specs.

But he volunteered with great eagerness to give us a lecture. Naturally, his offer was gratefully accepted; for there was a strong suspicion that the first lecture would also prove the last, so if some one could be found to start the affair the whole trouble might very likely finish with the same.

He announced that the subject of his lecture would be "Trilobites."

"What on earth are they?" the question was passed when the geologist had left the wardroom.



“Some of those old ancient blokes you read about in the Old Testament,” suggested one; “you know, like the Hivites and Perizzites and Jebusites; we shall have to listen to an account of the manners and customs of some infernal heathen tribe that died out a million years ago, and a good job too!”

“I don’t think it means that at all,” said the Gunnery-Lieutenant. “I came across the name the other day; it’s a new form of high-explosive, an improvement on T.N.T. I’ve no doubt it will prove a very interesting lecture, and I for one shall be very glad to listen to it!”

The Navigator, who preferred to pronounce the word Tri-lobby-tees, said that it was the name of an ancient Greek hero; he remembered reading about him at school, when he used to have to mug at the classics. He explained, some days later, that he had confused the name with Triptolemus; but, as he said, the principle was the same!

Finally we looked the word out in Chambers’s Encyclopædia (Volume SWAS to ZYRI), and discovered something of the true nature of trilobites, which somehow did not promise to be very thrilling.

The lecturer, however, was frightfully keen on his subject. When he had got us all at his mercy he warmed up to it and got very excited, and his eyes sparkled behind the gold-rimmed spectacles, and somehow he conveyed the impression that a life without trilobites was hardly worth living.

The Gunnery-Lieutenant, as soon as he found

out that the subject had nothing to do with high-explosives, made a noise like some one who has just remembered an important fixture, pulled an engagement-book out of his pocket, turned over its pages rapidly, and got up with a brief word of excuse, and vanished from the room.

The lecturer simply wrestled with his pet subject. He analysed it, classified it, drew pictures of it; told us what trilobites were, where they could be found, what they had been in their palmy days some few million years back, and how we might recognise the points of a first-class full-blooded trilobite. We had sections of trilobites, photographs of them, specimens of them—and, altogether about two hours of them. Finally, when the whole audience was reduced to splitting yawns, the lecturer sank exhausted into a chair and announced that his few words had now come to an end. When the applause ceased he stood on his feet again and said that the matter was now open to discussion, and he would be happy to answer any questions we might care to ask.

There was a profound silence for a whole minute. Then our prize lunatic arose slowly from his chair, and in most deliberate tones said: "I should be very glad if you would tell me—What *is* a Trilobite?"

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## 6. *A Real Interlude*

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THE Captain's Clerk, carrying a load of care in his features and a sheaf of official documents in his hand, moistened his forefinger on the tip of his tongue—an unpleasant practice, but useful—and turned over his papers rapidly till he found the one he wanted. Having withdrawn it from the sheaf, he presented it in his best official manner to Lieutenant Wigglesby.

Wigglesby perused the document rapidly, and remarked: "Dear me!" or words to that effect, in tones of strong disapproval. Then, as swift reflections swept across his mind, he added the qualifying remark: "Well, I d'know; p'raps it won't be so rotten, after all; anyway, it'll be a change from this, and I may be able to pinch a couple of days' leave out of it with luck!"

Everybody in a wardroom is always curious about everybody else's business, and considers that he has a right to know it—a right which is usually conceded as a matter of course. We came straight to the point, without any beating about the bush, and asked Wigglesby what had happened,

"Just been told that I'm lent to the *Matchbox*, and have to proceed immediately."

"What for? Her skipper gone sick?"

"I expect so. It doesn't say, naturally."

"What is the *Matchbox*? Know anything about her?"

"One of the most prehistoric of the old thirty-knotters, I believe. Don't know where she is at present, but I have an idea she's in the Bristol Channel patrol. Nice place with a seven-knot tide and cross-currents playing catch-as-catch-can—and an old t.b.d. whose engines are probably tied together with bits of spun-yarn! Well, well; me for the gay life! I shall get quit of the sight of all you ugly blighters for a month or so, anyhow, so that's something."

We understood—as an outsider probably would fail to do—that Wigglesby was as proud and pleased with his prospective command as if he had been appointed captain of a Dreadnought; and that he was, at the same time, extremely sorry at being cut adrift from his old messmates.

A combined struggle with Bradshaw extracted after some time the information that the quickest route would be to go straight to London, and then take the midnight express from Paddington to Plymouth, changing there into a cross-country train.

Four days later Wigglesby woke with a start from a peaceful slumber in the corner of a railway-

carriage; the sudden ceasing of the slumberous droning noise and a jerking stop called him to his senses. He looked out of the window and saw nothing more exciting than the green fields and hedges of the heart of Devonshire. The guard was coming along the side-path of the single-line track towards Wigglesby's carriage; it was not a long walk, as the train consisted only of two coaches and a luggage-van.

"May as well get down, sir," reported the guard; "the cutting right head is blocked. There's a tidy lot of earth and rubble fallen in; powerful heavy rain here yesterday must have loosened it."

"What chance of going on?"

"Well, I'm going to walk on to the signal-box; that's a matter of three mile from here, and wire for the breakdown gang from Exeter. It'll take them the best part of six hours to clear the line when they get here. You'd best walk through the fields to the village over in that direction and pass the time there; if you come back about half-past eight or nine you'll be in plenty of time."

Wigglesby, with a happy knack of accommodating himself to circumstances, extracted from his gear a trout-rod in well-worn brown canvas case, and inquired the name of the village.

"'Tis Leys Applewick, sir; nought but a smallish place. But as I see you'm keen on the

fishing, there's good streams in the neighbourhood, I b'lieve."

"May as well put in the time that way," reflected Wigglesby. "Can't bother about permission as time's so short, and must hope to find the keeper in a good temper if I come across him."

But, as it turned out, there was no need to trust to this event; the sum of eighteenpence disbursed at the Leys Applewick post-office procured a license to fish the rivers Durdle, Chedd, and Halfways for one day; and local knowledge, freely heaped upon him by the village postmaster, directed Wigglesby to a point where the Durdle runs into the Chedd, just above the rapid reach of Ermiston Cleave.

Clear brown water, with a few great moss-topped boulders in mid-stream; a slope clad with young heather and bracken fern down to the water's edge; larks singing overhead, and in the distance a view of purple tors. And the trout rising splendidly. Wigglesby felt the new life of it all simply pouring into him.

"Gude sport, Maister?"—a voice at his side surprised him. He turned and saw a man of some fifty-five years in keeper's rig.

"Good? I should think so!" The lieutenant pointed to half a dozen glistening fish, not one of them under half a pound. "Not bad for an hour's fishing, eh?"

"An' what be yew, zur?" inquired the keeper, looking hard at Wrigglesby's uniform monkey-jacket and cap, and disregarding the question of sport in his curiosity; "somethin' to do wi' the railway, I rackon?"

"No," said Wrigglesby, rather amused than otherwise. "I belong to the Royal Navy."

"Aw, do'ee, now? There's a young chap from Applewick belongs to the Navy, tew. He's a stoker, I b'lieve, by the name o' Dump—Dick Dump. Do'ee know un?"

Wrigglesby regretted that he could not claim acquaintance with Stoker Dick Dump, but politely inquired what ship he was serving in.

"Do'ee mane the name o' the boat e's on? Aw, that I cud'n tell'ee now: but tis one o' these 'ere large gunboats, they that carries a dizzen gert cannons, so I'm told. Wait a bit, now—'tis the Hoary-'un, I mind!"

"Ah, the *Orion*! Well, I suppose you take a great interest in naval matters in the village—and, for that matter, in the war in general, eh?"

"Dunno what yew might call takin' an interes'! 'Tis this way, do'ee zee. Us gets the '*Ev'nin' Errle*' up from Plymouth, an' us rades un threw, but 'tis the letters from the young chaps at the front as us sets most store by, and they dawn't tell very much in the way o' news—not what yew might call news! There's my sister's son, Bob

'Olliday, over to France, and my firs' cousin, Bill Pascoe, out in—what d'ye call that place? 'Tis mentioned in the Bible—Mess, mess-up, somthin' or other. I can't well put my tongue to it—"

"Mesopotamia?"

"Ah, that's of it! They and a score o' young chaps besides gone from Applewick, some to th' Army, some gone to say; but us dawn't get much news from any o' them—not what yew might call news."

"Why, don't they write and tell you all about the war, and how they're doing, and all that?"

"Aw, yas, they tells us all that! Tur'ble grand doin's, and wunnerful sights they must 'a zeen, by all accounts, tew! But—wull, I give'ee an example now: Bob 'Olliday, 'e went awver to France a matter of some twelve months ago; an' before 'e went, I ses to un: 'Bob,' I ses, 'you'm goin' far across the says, into strange and wunnerful furrin' parts. 'Tis a very movin' thought, an' a gert expayrience, 'specially for one so young's yew be! But you'm a knowledgeable lad, an' your parents 'ave given 'ee a gude insight into the ways o' farmin'.' Now, I ses to un, 'I 'ear tell as 'ow they be great 'ands at root-crops awver in they parts. What I want 'ee to dew, then,' I ses, 'is to take partickler care an' find out what sort o' manure they dew use, and let us knaw when you'm writin'.' But do'ee think e's ever made so much as mention of it? Not one word! Addle-pated



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### *Grand Fleet Interludes*

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buffle-'eads, these young chaps be, to be sure !  
An important matter like that now; wud'n 'ee  
'ave thaught 'e'd kape it in mind ? 'tis as I was  
tellin 'ee, us dawn't get naw news—not what yew  
might call news ! ”

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### 7. *The Visit of H.M.S. Chatty.*

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**E**VEN to the hard-worked destroyer an interlude in its strenuous round is sometimes officially permitted. The bowstring must be relaxed occasionally, as the ancient proverb hath it, and destroyer officers are, after all, only human, though there are people who would deny them this attribute ! So a wise arrangement has so ordered matters that destroyers shall take a spell now and then ; just like the pirates and buccaneers of the good old days used to do.

Of course, the kind of relaxation allowed is not exactly that which they would choose for themselves if given a free hand. In such a case, probably, the first choice would be to turn the boat over to a care-and-maintenance party, and all go on leave for a fortnight ; and the next best thing would be to tie up alongside a dockyard wall where they could land after dark and steal things.

Neither of these Elysian joys, however, comes within the range of practical politics at the present time. Short of this, the best thing that can be arranged is that a destroyer shall lie alongside a big ship for a few days, with steam at a little longer notice than usual.

You see the idea, of course? The poor, weary, and toil-battered fellows can relax their tired limbs and close their overstrained eyes, and forget their nerve-racking labours for a little while. The great battleship, like a tender mother, receives the little destroyer as a tired child, and takes it to rest against her broad bosom, saying: "Come, little one, forget your wanderings, your troubles, and your labours for a while; lean on me; let me nourish and refresh you; so shall you be strong again and fitted for your great emprise!"

That is the theory. At least, I suppose so.

Now let us come to the matter as it works out in practice.

I wonder if you happen to know the *Chatty*? She is one of the C-class destroyers, which have done so well ever since they first came on the scene, and the *Chatty* has been by no means the least famous amongst them. Her officers—well, I will tell you about them presently, and let you form your own opinion.

The *Chatty* was told off to come and lie alongside H.M.S. *Hypersuper* during a lull in naval activities, and those on board the great battleship discussed the coming visit in that spirit of hospitality for which they are at least as much renowned as their fellows in other ships.

"They will be alongside us for some few days, I daresay?" said the Mess Caterer, "and we must see if we can't put up something extra in the meal line; I don't suppose they've had a square feed

for months, and they'll be glad of the chance to get their teeth into something a bit better than tin-bag and hard-boiled eggs."

"The main point is to let them feel themselves at home," said the Mess President; "let them buy up all the armchairs and settees if they want to, and have first read of all the mess papers, if they feel like it; we can have these things at any time—they can't."

"Of course, our billiard-table will be a great attraction for them," said another officer; "so let them have it to themselves just for these few days; and, if we can revive bridge at all, no doubt they'll be glad to get a game."

Various other kindly suggestions were made; and in due course H.M.S. *Chatty* came alongside.

Within an hour of their arrival, half the *Hyper-super's* wardroom officers and the whole of the gunroom had migrated to the *Chatty*; a couple of the former drifted back presently and said: "Come along, you fellows, don't stick here in this stuffy old ship, come across to the *Chatty*!" The method of "coming across," which was *de rigueur* by this time, consisted of taking a flying leap from the *Hypersuper's* deck in the battery some eight or nine feet downwards, and about the same distance across the intervening ditch; true, there were people standing on the *Chatty's* deck, holding a stretched-out gun-cover to catch the arrivals; the method appeared such a popular pastime that it was not considered sufficient to go

through the performance once, but there was a constant queue circling round, coming upwards over the gang-plank and downwards through the air !

At dinner-time, the *Hypersuper's* wardroom was deserted by all except the Fleet-Paymaster, the Engineer-Commander, and the Chaplain. Over in the *Chatty* a crowd almost equal in numbers to the chorus of a Drury-lane Revue were having a sort of Progressive Dinner-Party, which began in the wardroom and tailed out on the upper deck, taking all the cabins and part of the engine-room on its way. This arrangement did not interfere, however, with the free interchange of what may be generically classed as "Bonhommy," the guests on deck choosing the skylight as the fitting approach on the frequent occasions when they desired to fraternise with their friends in the little wardroom below. As for the fare provided, the only comment necessary is the remark which embittered the *Hypersuper's* Mess-Caterer for weeks afterwards : " Why can't we get stuff to eat like the *Chatty's* ? They seem to be able to manage things all right ! Surely, if they can do it," and so on, till the unhappy Mess-Caterer's life became a burden to him.

The Fleet-Paymaster and the Engineer-Commander of the *Hypersuper* were able to have the billiard-table to themselves for the whole evening, for the first and only time in the commission, the Chaplain acting as marker. Not even bridge had

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## Grand Fleet Days

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much of a look-in on board the *Chatty*. There was an attempt to get up a game of Van-John, but it was given up in favour of the more manly parlour game of diving through the pantry trap-hatch.

At 2.15 a.m. the *Chatty*'s R.N.R. Sub. was with difficulty dissuaded from calling on the *Hyper-super*'s captain to pay his respects. As the Sub. in question stood six feet four in his socks and had been for two years the champion heavy-weight of the Pink Funnel Line, it took some little time to induce him to defer his visit to another occasion.

The *Chatty* remained alongside three days. When she departed, the battleship's opinion may be expressed in the words of one of the officers, who was overheard saying: "Well, let's have a fleet action or anything for a quiet life, but I hope it will be some months before we see those bright lads again!"

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## 8. *The Paper Auction*

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WE take in a good many papers and magazines of one sort or another in our mess. The range is extensive and peculiar. Some of them seem exceedingly inappropriate for the reading-matter of people whose profession is "following the sea." There is, for example, the *Field*, without which no wardroom is complete; every naval officer who has ever shot at a snipe and missed it feels himself bound to vote for the *Field* at the meeting when the selection of papers is made. From that, we skip lightly to the *Nation*, just to see what those dashed Radicals have to say for themselves; and there is a large and varied assortment in between. It happens consequently, since our tastes are so catholic and practically every one gets all the papers of his own pet fancy, that the vulgar question of paying for such a large collection of literature is sometimes not easy to settle. And another question also arises, as to what shall be done with all the stacked-up masses of old papers—such of them, at least, as do not find their way by devious courses to the mess-deck.

"Send 'em all along to the Sick-Bay," suggests

one; "they may help the patients to bear up against the doctors' treatment!"

And this plan is frequently adopted; so that you may frequently see the sailors laid in a hammock of sickness perusing old copies of *Engineering* or the *Nineteenth Century*, and other such light literature; and you would probably be struck with their learned tastes, if you did not happen to know that the sailor will read anything from Sanskrit Grammar to Patent Medicine Advertisements, rather than not read at all!

As a rule, however, the most practical plan of solving the double problem is found to be that of auctioning the papers for the ensuing quarter. This gets rid of the old accumulation, since officers who become purchasers will either post off the papers to their homes or else have them sent down to their cabins, there to be forgotten until such time as the next appointment is gazetted. Anyhow, the papers get cleared out of the mess this way!

Another great consideration is that a sum of money is hereby collected sufficient to pay for the papers without touching the mess subscription at all, so that we can thus get more papers and still more papers until the enemy—beg pardon, I was thinking of something else.

There are two ways of conducting a paper auction.

One is the tame method of sticking up on the notice-board a detailed list of what papers are being taken in, with a request that officers will



kindly write against each one the amount they are willing to pay for it, the highest bidder naturally getting it in each case. Thus you may see, for instance : *Punch* : A.B., 3*d.*; C.D., 9*d.*; E.F. 1*s.* 3*d.*; G.H., 1*s.* 6*d.* And G.H., of course, gets it.

But since this method not only fails to bring in very much money, but fails also to provide us with a pleasing Interlude in our monotonous round, the alternative method is the one more generally adopted.

“Come on, girls ! We’re going to auction the papers !”

“Good egg ! Liqueurs all round, down to the paper fund, I suppose ?”

“Why, sure ! Must get you blighters into a merry mood before you’ll warm up and shell out like little gentlemen ! Come on, we’re just going to start !”

“Who’s the auctioneer ?”

“Flatfoot Fred ; come on, MacNab, he’ll get money even out of you, ye pawky, close-fistit chiel ! Hoot awa’ !”

The bulwark of Empire flippantly alluded to as Flatfoot Fred is standing at the end of the long wardroom table, with the presidential hammer in his hand, and knocks for silence till you can’t hear yourself speak.

“Officers, and gentlemen—and others !” he begins ; “we have here a choice selection of the very best papers that have ever been placed before

a discriminating public. Some of you will be all the better for improving your little minds by reading them; and some of you have got minds that are past improving—”

“Name!” cries one of the audience.

“Name? Did I hear the honourable member say Name?” replies the auctioneer. “If the guilty conscience of my despicable interrupter wishes to have his blood-stained career held up to the well-deserved opprobrium of—Oh, I’m sorry, I thought I was in the new Irish Parliament! Let’s get on with the good work. We’ll begin with the *Army List*, A magnificent volume, consisting of well over six hundred pages—and you know what that must cost with a paper famine on—tastefully bound in a delicate shade of rose-pink.”

“Tuppence,” cries some one, to start the game.

“Tuppence! Tuppence, did you say? Leaving out of the question the ignorance of grammar displayed in such a remark, I would merely say that tuppence is a miserly, mean, niggardly—”

“Tuppence-ha’p’ny.”

“We don’t make ha’f-yins. Any advance?”

“Fourpence!”

“That’s better! But if you get this for fourpence you’ll get more than Lloyd George’s ninepennyworth. Any further offers, gentlemen?”

Eventually it gets knocked down for one-and-sixpence.

“Now, then, the *Tatler*! All the nobs, in their Sunday cloes! Brides of the week—and

how some of 'em get husbands is a living marvel ! Many other thrilling features, and the advertisements alone are worth the money ! ”

There is a great run on the *Tatler*. A similar demand exists for most of the other picture-papers ; though there is spirited bidding also for the *Waifs-and-Strays Magazine*, and other such publications, sent to us gratuitously.

“ Lastly,” says the exhausted auctioneer, after an hour’s hard talking, “ we come to *La Vie*. Now, then, Padre, you know you’re always reading it : what offers ? Gentlemen, I appeal to you all, good money for *La Vie* ! Decorate your dug-outs, send it to your maiden aunts, present it to your old Sunday school ! Study the French language, read the thrilling serials—all together, please, what offers ? Those of you who know what Art is, now’s your chance. Those who wish to study the habits and customs of our gallant Allies, seize this golden opportunity ! Buy it ! Try it in your bath ! Refuse all imitations ! Going for twenty-three shillings ! Twenty-four, thank you ! Twenty-six ! Twenty-seven ! One-pound-ten ! That’s the spirit, true British sportsmen ! *La Vie* for One-pound-ten ! It’s giving it away ! Well, well, no advance ? Take it, sir, it’s yours !—Gosh, I am dry ! Give me a drink, quick ! ”

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## 9. *Flat Racing*

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WE have amongst us a certain officer who rather fancies himself as an athlete, and more particularly as a long-distance runner. Between ourselves, his real speciality is that of a long-bow drawer, and his marvellous accomplishments on the track are not based on any more reliable foundations than his own statements. At least, so we all thought, until he volunteered to prove his claims by racing any of us for any distance we pleased with any wager we liked.

Our First-Lieutenant, however, refused to be impressed by any such boasting challenge. "Young fraud!" he said; "he knows very well that he is quite safe in making the offer; there's not a chance of our going to any place fit for a race of that sort within the next six months!"

"What about Bog Island?" suggested another of us.

Bog Island is a diminutive isle where we are sometimes permitted to go ashore and look at the sky and the sea and the ships for the benefit of our health. That is not its proper name, but it

will do for present purposes. Bog Island is not a picturesque spot; in fact, the only ornamental thing about it is its outline, which closely resembles the pattern you make on bread and butter when you wiggle treacle on it from a spoon held some distance above it; you mustn't hold the spoon too high, or else the treacle is very liable to make patterns on the tablecloth instead of on the bread and butter, and then there may be trouble.

That, however, was not exactly what I was going to say, although it is very interesting. I meant to give a brief description of Bog Island; but on second thoughts will leave it to your imagination, only remarking that the difference between it and a blob of mud lies chiefly in point of size.

"Bog Island would do very well," said our Champion Runner, knowing that the place was entirely unsuitable. "We could easily arrange some sort of a track there—not a good one, of course, but it could be made to do. I'll run any one of you there, any distance from three miles to fifty, for any money you like,"

"I'll take you up," said our Quiet Man.

"What you? Why, you've never run a race in your life!"

"Never mind; all the better for you. You challenged any one of us, and I have taken you up. I will race you for fifteen miles, and, well, what

shall we say for the stakes? Will ten quid suit you?"

"My dear fellow, I couldn't take your money—not evens, anyhow. But I'll give you ten to one."

"As you please; it's very good of you. But I wish to make one condition, or, rather, two. First, that I have a month to train in, and second that we do not run together but on different occasions, timed by a stop watch. You shall run one day, and I will run the next and try to beat your record."

"It's unusual," said our Athlete, "but I can see no objections to it. Let us have all the conditions down in writing, signed by witnesses, shall we?"

"Exactly what I was going to suggest," replied our Quiet Man.

"Aren't you going to train at all?" asked the Quiet Man's friend, a fortnight later. "Look at you, smoking as much as ever, not going T.T. and deuce of a bit of exercise do you ever take. How do you expect to win; he is on strict training, making a regular martyr of himself, just because he has an idea you may be a bit of a dark horse."

"Don't you worry," said the Quiet Man. "I shall win all right, but I'm not going to train any more than I'm doing now."

We all assembled on Bog Island to watch the Athlete run his fifteen miles. As he came round the winding track and passed us at each lap we cheered him heartily and waved the soothing drinks we had brought ashore with us—for our own delectation, not for his !

He did dig out, and stuck the course manfully. At the end of the twelfth mile he showed signs of distress, but still he kept on. Finally he fell down exhausted at our feet, at the conclusion of the complete distance, and we revived him with long whiskies-and-sodas.

Presently he sat up smiling, and said confidently, " Well, I don't think old Slow-Coach will beat that in a hurry ! "

The morrow came, and once more we all assembled on Bog Island.

The Quiet Man—who was also our Torpedo-Lieutenant—brought with him a couple of leading-torpedomen, some poles, wires, string, an electric battery, and a collection of other gear.

" What on earth are you going to do with all that stuff ? " we asked.

He did not answer, but proceeded with the help of his assistants to erect four poles like miniature goal-posts, each pair exactly one foot from the other pair. Some four feet from the ground an extremely fine wire was stretched taut across the first pair of posts, and the other pair was then treated in the same way. The wires were then led

to the battery, which in its turn was connected up with a curious-looking clock.

When all was ready, our Quiet Man took off his coat, and retired to a little distance from the parallel posts, facing them. Then he said "Stand-by," and dashed forward, breaking through the two thin wires almost simultaneously. When he had done this he stopped and said, "What do you make it?"

The first leading-torpedoman consulted his electrical clock and said, "As near as I can make it, sir, one hundredth part of a second."

"Call it a little less, to be on the safe side," said the Quiet Man; "let it go at eighty-eight feet per second. That's at the rate of a mile a minute. Rig up the wires again and I'll do the second foot!"

"What the, why the—look here, what's this?" shouted our Athlete, dimly perceiving that he was being "had."

"Oh, it's quite all right," said the Quiet Man! "I'm going to do my fifteen miles one foot at a time; there's nothing in the conditions laid down to say that I may not, is there?"

We all supported him in this.

"Of course," he said, "it will take some little time to get through the whole course; but I reckon that when it is all over I shall be found to have done my fifteen miles in something under fifteen minutes. Can you beat that, do you think?"



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## *Grand Fleet Interludes*

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The race was not run out to a finish, and the stakes were not paid. Mutual arrangement settled all this. But our Athlete has not talked half so much about his achievements since the great day of the race.

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## 10. *The Squeegee Band*

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OF all the light cruisers in H.M. Navy, the *Flanders* was the smartest, cleanest, sportiest, in fact everything-est, on the top line in any department you may like to mention. She carried away the most first prizes at squadron regattas, her boxing men knocked out the best fighters of the whole battle-squadron to which they were once temporarily attached, at all evolutions she was always ahead of her sister-ships, and her paint looked as if it were newly-done for a Spithead review. No other ship of the class would dream of disputing the *Flanders*' superiority in any point—with one sole exception; her sister-ship, H.M.S. *Belgium*, considered herself not only equal to the *Flanders*, but indeed far superior.

Chiefly they based their arrogant claims on the undoubted fact that they had seen more actual scrapping than the *Flanders*—which they were rude enough to call the *Glanders* when they met men of the rival ship, though they did not meet very often, since experience had shown that it was not wise to allow the two crews ashore at the same time. It was rumoured, in fact, that before

this wise decree was brought into force the naval hospitals were principally kept going by Flanders and Belgians who had met in the street and argued the point.

Judge then of the consternation created when the First Lieutenant of the *Flanders* burst into the wardroom one morning with the horrifying announcement: "Bless my pretty little eyes"—(or words to that effect)—"if they haven't weathered us. They've got a band!!"

Every one in the wardroom understood quite well who "they" meant; their hated rivals, the Belgians!

"A band!" they echoed blankly.

"Oh, why didn't we think of it before?" wailed the First Lieutenant; and then, with the natural desire to blame somebody else—"Why some of you fellows couldn't have started the idea beats me! Here am I slaving night and day to think out schemes to buck the ship up while you——" He broke down here in his utter inability to find words sufficient to cope with the situation.

"What sort of a band have they got?" asked one of the company after a painful interval of silence.

"Oh, a squeegee band of sorts; a couple of accordions, an ocarina, and some tin whistles: one man plays the fiddle, and they've bought a drum. And they knock out some very good music, too! I met a fellow ashore yesterday

who told me about it. They mean to have their precious band up to play at doubling-round, and there is some talk of their switching it on for church on Sundays ! ”

“ I’ll tell you what,” suggested another officer presently—“ let’s beat them at their own game ! We’ll get up a band, too—only ours shall be a pukka one, not a squeegee band ! ”

“ And how on earth are we going to manage that, Brainy ? ” asked the First Lieutenant sarcastically. “ We’ve only got one musician rating in the ship, and he can’t play any instrument except the paint-brush ! ”

“ You leave it to me,” replied the other, darkly.

The First Lieutenant read aloud from the signal-chit in his hand : “ Wardroom officers of H.M.S. *Belgium* accept with much pleasure the kind invitation of wardroom officers of H.M.S. *Flanders* to dine with them on the anniversary of their commission.”

“ That’s all right, then,” he said. “ I was half afraid they might not come. Now, see that every one of them has a band programme stuck bang in front of him at dinner.”

“ By Jove ! music ? We didn’t expect that ! Hired for the evening, I suppose ? Dashed good of you ! ” exclaimed one of the Belgians, as he took his seat at the wardroom table.

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## Grand Fleet Interludes

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“Oh, dear no! That’s just our band—our Squeegee Band! You mustn’t expect very much from it, you know; they do their best—they do their best!”

Just as he spoke, the opening crash of an operatic overture sounded on their ears. Played, too, by a very efficient orchestra. As the dinner proceeded other musical numbers followed; a selection from Gilbert and Sullivan, a solo on the ’cello, and finally “Pomp and Circumstance”; no regular ship’s band could have played better.

The *Belgium’s* First Lieutenant began to smell a rat. “I should like to see your band after dinner, if I might,” said he; “you know I take an interest in music—I run our band, our Squeegee Band; but, of course, it’s nothing to compare with yours!”

Half-an-hour later he was led to inspect them. He saw two chief stokers, an armourer, a private of marines, three able seamen, a writer, and a sick-berth attendant; all tuning up their instruments for an “extra.”

Still, he had his suspicions, though he said nothing.

Next morning the same officer came on board unexpectedly, just after Divisions. When the *Flanders’* men were doubling round the decks, sure enough, the band was playing for them, and the bandsmen were the same ratings as the night before.

Even this did not altogether allay his suspicions.

He went back to his own ship muttering: "I'm sure there's something snide about it, if I could only put my finger on what it is!"

He cogitated deeply on the matter for many days, and then a brilliant idea occurred to him.

"The Belgians actually want to borrow our band!" exclaimed the *Flanders'* First Lieutenant; "pretty cool cheek of them, isn't it? What do you think—shall we let them go, or make some excuse?"

"Oh, let them go," advised his confidant; "it will just take the shine out of them finally; they won't talk about their Squeegie Band after their ship's company have heard ours, I bet!"

"But d'you think it'll be all right?"

"Oh, yes; they will only have to play and then come off again; they won't be away from the ship more than a couple of hours."

But they were longer than that. The *Belgium's* afternoon entertainment to local munition-workers was suddenly cut short by a signal ordering her to put to sea immediately. Her First Lieutenant grinned as he pushed the guests ashore. "Sorry I can't keep the boats down long enough to send the *Flanders'* band back to their ship; they'll have to go to sea with us for this trip. Let them join up with the proper messes and fall in with the rest!"

The Chief Stoker on watch in the *Belgium* stoke-  
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hold brought two men up before the Engineer Officer-of-the-Watch. "Can't make nothin' out o' these people from the *Flanders*, sir," he reported; "they don't seem to know much about stokin'; one of 'em arst me where the coal-box was kept, and the other wanted the loan of a pair of gloves to keep his 'ands clean!"

Almost at the same moment an able seaman of the *Flanders*' band was being requested to "get that Handy-Billy from over there": "Do you mean that small boy dressed in seaman's costume with the trumpet at his side?" he replied; "come here, Billy; this gentleman wants you!"

And simultaneously, the *Flanders*' sick-berth attendant was being ordered by the surgeon to take the temperature of certain cot cases in the bay. "Where shall I take them, sir?" he asked; "would you like them here, or where will you have them?"

All these matters being in time related to the *Belgium*'s First Lieutenant, that officer proceeded to muster his unwilling guests, and said to them: "Now then, own up! What, in the name of fortune, are you, and where do you come from?"

"We used to be the orchestra of the Plus Ultra Cinema," they explained, "till a gentleman on the *Flanders* offered us better pay if we would come and play on his boat and dress ourselves like sailors!"

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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The *Flanders'* band is no more ; and if by chance the *Belgium's* men meet their rivals ashore, they make gestures illustrative of playing musical instruments ; and then the police have their work cut out for them.



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## 11. *Parlour Games*

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THE naval officer on the stage is always occupied either in making love to the heroine—sometimes in addition to all the other young ladies of the compay as well—or else in wading through ber-lud with a revolver in one hand, a sword in the other, and a musket slung round the back of his neck. In the intervals he is popularly supposed to be sailing a cutter single-handed, and laughing the winds and the waves to scorn—or some seamanlike pastime of a similar nature.

But if you catch him in his off time, so to speak, you will probably find the average naval officer practising tricks with matches—if he isn't asleep on the settee; or else he is laboriously trying to beat his own record with the poker dice, and throw five of each in less than seventy throws. Or, again, he is very possibly playing chess.

We had quite a chess wave during the first winter of the war. A grave silence—almost, in fact the silence of the grave—used to pervade the wardroom in the evenings after dinner. Half a dozen games would be going at once; and for a non-player to cough loudly or let a book drop on

the deck was as much as his life was worth. A hint at bridge was received with frowns of disapproval; and if a newcomer joined the ship the first question put to him was, "By the way, are you a chess-player by any chance?" We organised chess tournaments, then more tournaments, until every player had won a prize. We bought handbooks on chess, and studied gambits and endgames, and lots of jolly things like that. Oh, we did have a gay time!

I cannot exactly say what it was that caused chess to fade away into the land of outworn pleasures. But it did, and an effort to revive it the following winter failed utterly. Here and there a couple of bold fellows announced that they were opening the chess season; but we just shook our heads dubiously, and showed that there was Nothing Doing! we refused to be stirred from our lethargy.

After a time billiards took the place of chess. Some enterprising ship invested in a small-sized billiard-table, and all the other ships followed suit—as is always the case. In a very little while the ship that didn't possess a table was simply no class at all.

You may have heard of Van John, with variations—(cultured and refined folk speak of it as *Vingt-et-un*)—but on board ship we have billiards with variations. The most usual form of variation is that the game becomes a sort of cross between billiards and bowls. This, you must note, is not

from any choice on our part, but simply owing to the Exigencies of the Service.

For instance, having carefully levelled the table before starting—you do this by putting *All the World's Fighting Ships* under one leg of the table, and *Lean's Royal Navy List*, which is a trifle thicker, under the other—you proceed to play; and just as you are taking a fine shot you are made aware that this is the moment which the officer-of-the-day has chosen for hoisting in all boats; and a sudden list shows that the main-derrick has just been swung outboard, giving the ship a heel of a couple of degrees, more or less; sufficient, anyway, to make you miss your fine shot and score—one to your opponent!

Another variation is when those handy fellows on the upper deck open up the wardroom skylights after a shower of rain, and the accumulated water—about half a bucketful—descends generously upon the green cloth. Billiards played on a soaking wet table has a peculiar character of its own and calls for the nicest judgment. If you hit hard enough you may not perhaps get what you were trying for, but you are quite likely to get something else; and, after all, everything counts, and the other fellow isn't in any better case than you are!

Dominoes have had quite a vogue with us; but the people who have had experience at the Shanghai Club have an advantage which less travelled individuals can hardly be expected to

compete against. In fact, if you can believe their yarns, the chief life-work of people in Shanghai would appear to be playing dominoes. There is a suite of gilded saloons entirely reserved for this purpose with a staff of compradors or matadors—or something like that—to count up the pips for the players at the end of each game; and the ordinary wedding present consists of a set of dominoes, in priceless jade or Ming ware for swells like the Government House set and the clerks of the Shanghai Bank, down to bone ones for ordinary people like naval officers. But, of course, these stories may not be strictly accurate; you can never believe half what these people who have been on the China Station tell you.

For a little while we indulged in trifling with wire puzzles, irritating affairs, consisting of complicated rings and keys and loops of metal, with the same *motif* running through them all—namely, that you had to take something off something else and then to put it on again. Not that there was the least object in taking the silly thing to pieces; it was all very well as it was at first—so long as you let it alone it would let you alone; nor was it at all clear that any useful purpose was served by piecing the affair together again when once it had been taken apart. You had two, or perhaps three, perfectly good pieces of metal which made excellent tobacco-stoppers, so why take the trouble to put them once more into a hopeless tangle of no use to anybody?

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At all events, we did play with these wretched things; until we ran the risk of being put "under observation," with Yarmouth looming up in the near foreground; at which point we chucked them and turned our attention to something else.

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## 12. *The Last Interlude*

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THE ship was merrily rolling her way home to her base, and every man on board was as happy as happy as could be. For had they not been in action at last after many months of waiting, and had they not also themselves accounted for two of the enemy?

The general happiness took various forms. With the captain, who had been on the bridge for thirty-six consecutive hours, it took the form of sleep, after the most delicious hot bath he had ever enjoyed; his cabin was a wreck, a shell having entered at one side, exploding and reducing all the furniture and gear to a mass of cinders, and leaving a gaping rent four yards long in the ship's side through which the blue sky was seen and the tops of the waves lopped in now and again; but the captain lay like a log on the bare deck with a rolled-up coat under his head, and smiled in his sleep.

The watch below were singing in their messes; breaking off at times and lapsing into a half-shamed silence, because there were nearly two score

poor fellows who would never sing with them again.

But when battles are fought some men must lose the number of their mess, and what better way to go out than in a fight for King and country? So the cheeriness prevailed over the sadness, and those who sang loudest were those who would be the readiest to put their hands into their pockets for the widows and orphans.

The stokers down below and the chippy-chaps above and around and all over the place were the busiest of all on board. The former were grinning joyfully at the recollection of having done their bit towards winning the day, and of having knocked two knots more than she had ever done before out of the old junk; the latter were making such temporary repairs as they could, plugging shot-holes and clearing away debris, and doing it with the satisfaction of a bruised and battered fighter who says cheerfully, " But you should see the other fellow ! "

One other group of workers was perhaps busier still; these were the surgeons and the sick-berth attendants, down in the medical distributing flats for the most part. They had to perform operation after operation, working hour after hour without rest or intermission, braced to their work by the marvellous grit and courage that their badly wounded patients displayed.

The less serious cases had already received

"first-aid," sometimes at the hands of their mess-mates, and were content to be left comfortable for a time, until further care could be given them, one of the sick-berth staff having taken the precaution to cast an eye over them and see that all was well for the present.

"There are no cases amongst the officers, then?" questioned the fleet-surgeon, as he washed his hands in carbolic solution before tackling another amputation.

"Only Mr. Suckling, sir," answered the Sick-berth Steward, "and he says he can do very well as he is for the time; he's lying on his bunk, and has a dressing on his wound; he says he isn't in any pain."

"Good!" said the doctor, and fell to his work again.

The officer who was the subject of this hurried conversation was at this moment peacefully smoking a cigarette, and chatting at ease with three or four of his brother officers. These came to the cabin in relays, never leaving him to feel lonely; it seemed tough luck that he should be the only one of them all to be wounded. Notwithstanding there were many who envied him; it is something to have been wounded, after all, let alone the sick-leave that would all come in good time after convalescence.

"Sure you feel quite comfy, Baby?" "Baby" was, naturally, Suckling's nickname; how could



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## *Grand Fleet Interludes*

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it be otherwise? "Babes and sucklings" are always bracketed together, and besides, he had such innocent blue eyes!

"Quite, thanks, old man. I get a bit of a twinge every now and then, but so long as I keep still in the one position I'm all kiff. There's a deuce of a lot of blood, though; it has soaked right through the bandages."

"We'll get one of the doctors to look at you presently, old thing; don't suppose they'll be long now."

"Oh, for goodness' sake leave them to deal with those that need them more than I do! There's some pretty bad cases, aren't there?"

"Yes. You know Stilingfleet, in your division? Well he's got to have his leg off above the knee!"

"Poor devil! Beastly rough luck that. Ough!"

"What is it? Hurting you, Baby?"

"All right again now; but that was a bit of a twister!"

"Perhaps we'd better clear out, some of us. Too much company isn't good for you, I expect."

"Well, don't all go. Brabazon, you're not busy, are you?"

"No, Baby."

"Well, then, don't go. I say, I'm feeling jolly perky, you know! It was a ripping show, wasn't it? And just top-hole to get the old packet knocked about a bit—just enough to get two or three weeks' refit!"

"Well, you are a nice patriotic blighter, I don't think!"

"Oh, well, one ship more or less out of action for a time won't matter much—especially now the Huns have had such a knocking about that they won't think of leaving harbour for a good while to come. It's very unselfish of me, really; I'm sure of my own leave, anyhow, and I'm only thinking of you."

"Very nice of you, I'm sure! But we shan't have a nice fair young thing to hold our hands and look unutterable things into our eyes like you will!"

"Well! Then you should get engaged, like me. I say, good idea; it wouldn't be a bad plan to get married while I'm on the convalescent racket! By Jove! I shall bless this jolly old wound if it means working in a honeymoon!"

"Think you'll be well enough?"

"Why, sure! It doesn't worry me even now except—Ow! That comes of talking about it—bad joss!"

"Would you like to write a line to her now, just to put in the time?"

"No, I don't think so, thanks. I'll do that from the hospital ship as soon as I get on board. Lord! She is such a brick—just the sweetest. You don't mind my drivelling away like that, old man? Don't tell any of the other fellows. I can't help it. If you only knew her, you would—"

"Go on, you dear old ass, if it pleases you;

I'm sure you're quite right about her. Hullo, here comes the Fleet-Surgeon."

Suckling turned his head on the pillow with a cheery grin.

"Hullo, you Man of Blood, come to cheer the sick and wounded? It seems a bit hard; I was all right till you came."

"None of your lip, young fellow-my-lad," replied the kindly doctor-man. "Well, and what's wrong with you?"

"Bit of a hole punched in my tummy by a splinter, that's all!"

"That's all!" said the Fleet-Surgeon, anxiously. "And quite enough, too, I should think!"

"Oh, well, it doesn't hurt much, though I've been bleeding like a pig."

"Well, let's have a look at it. Where is it? Who put that bandage on?"

"I did, myself. Top-hole job, wasn't it? I say, Doc.—I shall get a drop of leave out of this, shan't I?"

The doctor was busying himself in trying to get the bandage clear and inspect the damage. He did not reply to Baby's question, because just at the moment he should have done so he cried "Good God!"—then dashed to the cabin door and shouted wildly for assistance. Then he came quickly back to the side of the bunk whereon the patient lay. He appeared to swallow down something before speaking, and for a moment averted

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## *Grand Fleet Days*

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his eyes before he directed them full and steadily into Suckling's face.

Then, "Baby, old man," he said; "you're going to get leave all right—long leave; and very soon. Understand?"

**THE END**

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